

# **Dark Matter: Reactivating Myth to Visually Express the Existential Experience of ‘The Change’**

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## **Abstract**

My investigation is concerned with developing a visual language to express the existential transition from fertile womanhood. As Germaine Greer points out, whilst a vast array of medical material on this transition exists, we hardly ever hear the voices of women on the experience. This experience remains undescribed and invisible except for rare voices such as Simone de Beauvoir in her study *The Second Sex*, Doris Lessing in the literary arts, and Rosemarie Trockel in the visual arts.

The strange phenomenon of invisibility of archetypal experience such as this in our contemporary language is related by Carl Jung, Mircea Eliade, Joseph Campbell, and Suzi Gablik as symptomatic of our cultural constructs that view humans as apart from nature, and perpetuates a fragmented, abstracted and rationalistic way of seeing the world.

My investigation re-engages with this experience of transformation through appropriating the ancient vehicle of myth which traditionally gives form and meaning to archetypal experience, and inherently affirms connection between humans and the rest of the natural world. The mythological symbols which emerge in my art-making mostly have their origins in my Western cultural heritage and include the symbol of woman as vessel/grail, the moon, and the horn. Classical mythological figures such as Hekate are also referenced in my work.

The artists who contextualise this research draw on myth, or archetypal form, generate works from the body, and/or contribute to a dialogue on feminine experience. At a more essential level they re-affirm connection with our bodies, heritage, and the world of nature including our ancient and primal selves. These artists include: Rosemarie Trockel, Kiki Smith, Antony Gormley, Louise Bourgeois, Anselm Kiefer and Bronwyn Oliver.

Although much of my studio-based research has been conducted through drawings, the final works find resolution as sculptural objects. This submission presents a mythical landscape of metamorphosing object sculptures in a darkened space. Lighting is used to partially illuminate the sculptures and generate shadows that reveal other dimensions to the space and works. Each work describes something of liminal experience and is bound to the other works through repetition and variants of form, shape and pattern.

This investigation contributes to the field through redressing the silencing of women's voice on the experience of transformation beyond fertile womanhood, by re-engaging with modes of thinking and expression that remain undervalued in our contemporary world, and through contributing to an emergent voice that is concerned with the connectivity of humans with the rest of nature.

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## Introduction

My research is concerned with visually expressing the existential experience of the transition from fertile womanhood. In our Western culture this transition is described as *menopause* which is a medical term. It tells us more about the world we live in, our aspirations and our values as a group, than it does about the experience of change. We euphemistically call this transition ‘the change’, which is appropriate for my title, as the nature of change is one of the areas of investigation undertaken, and the use of a euphemism alludes to the taboo nature of my subject. However, in the body of this exegesis I speak of this as *a transition from fertile womanhood* as this transition is a movement into the unknown. As Germaine Greer points out: in Western culture we have no rites to acknowledge this change and we hardly ever hear the voices of women on this experience. This experience also remains undescribed and invisible in the fine arts except for rare voices such as Doris Lessing in the literary arts and Rosemarie Trockel in the visual arts.

The absence of a cultural language to describe archetypal experience such as this, is not an isolated, unrelated phenomenon. Carl Jung, Mircea Eliade, Joseph Campbell, and Suzi Gablik speak of it as symptomatic of our culture’s loss of myth, which is sustained by values that perpetuate a fragmented, abstracted and rationalistic way of viewing the world.<sup>1</sup> As Gablik says

The loss of myth, the assumption that the only valid ways of knowing are logical and linear, has resulted in a profound loss of moral orientation and meaning for life. Archetypal themes give form and meaning but as a culture, we have fallen out of meaning, leaving only the dreariness of calculated, mechanical process.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Although Jung speaks of our Western culture as having lost myth, he also says every culture, including our own, lives by myth. For the sake of clarity in this exegesis I use the term *construct* when referring to our contemporary Western cultural myths such as ‘menopause’, and I use the word *myth* specifically to refer to traditional myths that give form and meaning to archetypal experience.

<sup>2</sup> Gablik, S. *The Reenchantment of Art*. Thames and Hudson, New York, 1991. p. 47



This way of seeing separates us from even the most intimate areas of our lives; including our bodies, our senses, and the liminal spaces where we make sense of existence and change.

In the face of this absence of a cultural language, and as a remedy to this separateness, my visual investigation re-engages with transformative experience through appropriating the ancient vehicle of myth. Myth traditionally gives form and meaning to archetypal experience, and inherently affirms connection between humans and the rest of the natural world. The reactivation of myth has at its heart an affirmation of human interconnectedness. With the aim of transcending the limits of connectedness imposed by rational thought, I also re-engage with modes of thinking and expression that value the intuitive, the whole, and the subconscious.

While this investigation focuses on the transition from fertile womanhood, I have had a long-standing concern to create works that seek to come to terms with being a creature of nature belonging to a cultural group that denies its nature. These works previously took the form of an exploration of our evolving cultural perspectives on female mythological figures from my own cultural heritage, and often found their genesis in my dreams.

Myth provided another way of seeing the world that viewed humans as nature. Dreams provided unmediated access to my own nature. My first work addressing this concern was *Red Felt Vessel Dress* (Fig.1) – an image of ‘Pandora’s Pithos’<sup>3</sup> that was the making of a dream.



Fig 1: *Red Felt Vessel Dress* 2001  
130 x 150 x 150 cm, paper, rope and felt.

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<sup>3</sup> *Pithos* is an ancient vessel used to store grain, and acted as a burial urn, harbouring associations with both life and death. The term *Pandoras Pithos* comes from Hesiod's storytelling in *Works and Days* which described the creation of the first woman in Hesiod and Homer. *Works of Hesiod and the Homeric Hymns*. Translated by Hine, D. The University of Chicago Press. Chicago, 2005.

The most recent body of work, *The Shadow Gardens* (Fig.2) <sup>4</sup> made prior to this project examined the archetypal experience of the movement into womanhood – of sexual initiation – giving visual form to the Ancient Greek myth of the underworld journey of the Goddess Persephone. This archetypal exploration carried through to my Master research, although my Masters research is more directly informed by my own personal experience. Through this research I take an internal journey.



Fig 2: Works from *The Shadow Gardens* 2004

*Fall* 260 x 140 x 60cm, plaster and muslin.

*Bloom* 180 x 60 x 60cm, plaster and muslin.

*Prowl* 240 x 120 x 60cm, plaster, muslin and wood

This internal journey represents the second time in my art practice I have used *self* as subject. The first was given expression in a painting called *Solitude* (Fig.3)

<sup>4</sup> The *Shadows Gardens* takes its name from Roberto Calasso's retelling of Persephone's underworld journey in Calasso, R. *The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony*. Alfred. A. Knopf., New York, 1993. p.197–221

which records my movement into maturity, and was painted at the time of rupture from my childhood life. On the brink of this current transition I developed a strong empathy for the young woman that was depicted in this painting – the young woman that was once me. I was again facing a transition between stages of life that Simone de Beauvoir describes as ‘dangerously abrupt’ and ‘manifests in crises’.<sup>5</sup> This transition was no less dangerous than the first.



Fig 3: *Solitude* 1979. 120 x 94 cm , acrylic paint on canvas.

This research is concerned with the *existential* expression of my internal journey. It is not concerned with what happens to us in the world, but rather how we make sense of what happens to us. This intent takes the research beyond the realm of

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<sup>5</sup> De Beauvoir, S. *The Second Sex*. Penguin Modern Classics, Middlesex, 1972. p 587

the physical and the everyday life, and engages with the inner space where we construct meaning and face existence.

My initial experience of the inner space in this investigation was from the outside looking in. It was the space revealed through the rupture created by the inherent contradictions between my experience of change that permeated every aspect of my life, and my cultural language that celebrated youth as an unchanging ideal, and failed to describe this change in any meaningful way. What I faced was an experience that was based in absence and loss, that lacked a cultural form or image. This space I called *Dark Matter*.

The title *Dark Matter* acts as a metaphor on many levels. It refers to the liminal space of change between stages of life that remains ‘dark matter’ as it is largely undescribed and undervalued. It also refers to my fear that manifested an experience of *nothingness*; to my dark state of Being; and to my movement into the unknown. *Dark Matter* also refers to my intent to value, voice and face this experience through an investigation into the subterranean landscapes of the earth and Being – to return to what my ancient predecessors called *Matter*<sup>6</sup>. This opposes the ethereal elevated height to which we culturally aspire that extols our superiority to all else on earth. *Dark Matter* named my search for something dark, primal and essential – something that was invisible to me.

In cosmology, Dark Matter is invisible; it is experienced as absence, but it is thought to be a massive presence that is essential to existence. My title *Dark Matter* draws an analogy to this phenomenon, as it was my intent to change my consciousness and see the liminal space of change that initially appeared to me as an absence, as a presence that is essential to existence.

In my studio-based research this initially took the form of a formal investigation into space and change through the medium of drawing. My drawings were exploratory and broad ranging, depicting subjects, events and experiences that

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<sup>6</sup> Jung, C. (conceived and edited), Jung, von Franz., Henderson, Jacobi, and Jaffe, *Man and his Symbols*. Picador, London, 1964. p. 85

resonated with my experience of change. My works however, ultimately found resolution in the sculptural medium. My sculptural works exploited the learnings attained through drawing and focused specifically on the existential expression of my current experience of change.

The artists who contextualise this research, namely Rosemarie Trockel, Antony Gormley, Louise Bourgeois, Kiki Smith, Anselm Kiefer, and Bronwyn Oliver – draw on myth, or archetypal form, generate works from the body, and/or contribute to a dialogue on feminine experience. At a more essential level, they re-affirm connection with our bodies, our heritage, and the world of nature, including our Ancient and primal selves. They do not use a paradigm that perpetuates a model of supremacy and separateness; instead their approach to art-making is generative.

In Chapter One I discuss the lack of an adequate means to express the experience of the transition from fertile womanhood in contemporary Western culture and the reasons for this. As a remedy to this, I examine the function, pattern, form and expression of myth that has informed my approach to my reactivation of myth in my art-making. Chapter Two places the research project in the context of the work of artists who generate a ‘living cosmology’<sup>7</sup> engendering awareness of the ‘whole’ and of the interconnectedness of life. Chapter Three reports on the development of the visual work and how the studio based research was pursued.

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<sup>7</sup> Gablik, S. *The Reenchantment of Art*. Thames and Hudson, New York, 1991 p. 82

## Central concerns of the research

### ‘The change’ – an undescribed experience

My investigation seeks to contribute to what Germaine Greer calls ‘the undescribed experience’.<sup>1</sup> Through this research I aim to make sense of, value and give a voice to my recent experience of the transformations in consciousness and Being<sup>2</sup> as I move from fertile womanhood toward another stage in the life cycle.

The phenomenon of human change through life is not adequately reflected in our Western cultural constructs which could serve to equip us to make sense of this experience. Instead, our culture denies our passage through life with its constant change, in favour of dictating ideals of eternal youth. The movement from fertile womanhood and ageing in Western culture breeches our cultural ideal and is looked upon as something to be avoided and remedied.

By contrast, in many other cultures moving through the life cycle is viewed as a series of transformations that can be seen anywhere in nature. It is marked by stories of transcendence, understood through myths handed down, and enacted through rites of passage that equip the society and individual for such change, and define a social role beyond that change.

A fundamental difference between these two perspectives on human change is based on the cultural view of human’s place in nature. Western constructs perpetuate a hierarchical belief of humans as apart from and superior to nature. The seeds of such a belief can be read in the Old Testament where God, the

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<sup>1</sup>The Undescribed Experience is the title of Chapter 1, *The Undescribed Experience*, p. 11–35 in Greer, G. *The Change: Women, Ageing and the Menopause*. Hamish Hamilton, London, 1991.

<sup>2</sup> In Sartrean terms, being is purely a state of existing, but Being is a state of being which reveals one’s essence, one’s willingness to use one’s freedom and act upon the world. It is a term used to describe a consciousness that has not submitted to being determined. I am using the Existential term Being as this investigation is not concerned with what happens to us in the world, although this certainly is part of the investigation — I am concerned with how we make sense of what happens to us in the world — relating to our consciousness and our construction of meaning. See Sartre, J. *Being and Nothingness*. Citadel Press, NY, 1966.

Father's, very first instruction to the first man Adam was to name all His creation. In this myth, through naming, Adam 'gains dominion ... over all the earth'.<sup>3</sup> With this God-given right, we have developed a constructed world that physically, psychologically and spiritually removes us from our use and misuse of the earth.

This is the antithesis of Indigenous consciousness which embodies a deep respect for nature and an understanding of human as nature. As evidenced in Native American Chief Seattle's reply to President Washington's request to buy land in 1852

This we know: the earth does not belong to man, man belongs to the earth. All things are connected like the blood that unites us all. Man did not weave the web of life; he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself.<sup>4</sup>

It is from this perspective of respecting the human as nature – the belief that we are the stuff of this earth – that I intend to pursue in this investigation.

In pursuit of this perspective, my initial research looked to the form, the pattern and the nature of change that is the passage of life of all organic and inorganic matter, as a means of moving beyond the veneer of our constructed world to illuminate, understand, and give a voice to my experience of change in the light of change that happens everywhere in nature.

What if we, like the Native Americans, viewed ourselves as an interconnected strand in the web of life? Or like our Ancient predecessors revealed humans' affiliation with the rest of the natural world through our stories, images and forms? What if the series of transformations we go through in life were illuminated by the patterns and forms of transformations seen everywhere in nature? How might we then understand the profound experience of the transition

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<sup>3</sup> Authorized King James Version. *The Holy Bible: Containing the Old and New Testaments*. Holman Bible Publishers, Nashville, 1979. Old Testament, Genesis 1 : 6

<sup>4</sup> Campbell, J. with Moyers, B; Flowers, S. (ed). *The Power of Myth*. Doubleday, New York, 1988. p 34



from fertile womanhood? What would it be to embrace and value this mystery? These possibilities reveal some of the aspirations of the research.

Our patterns of transformation are like those of many other living creatures. David Suzuki's Eastern heritage and lifetime of observations of the natural world equipped him to understand his own changes in this light. He observes

In retrospect, my life has been marked by a series of transformations. It's interesting to note that in the rest of the biological world, profound change in the lives of many organisms is a natural and necessary part of their development. Often these changes involve dramatic transitions in physical makeup, behaviour and habitat. This process is called metamorphosis.<sup>5</sup>

Dramatic transitions in physical makeup often include transitions in behaviour and habitat, as shown in our own movement into adulthood. The plethora of changes resulting from bodily maturation; the change in study, the movement into work – or worse: no work – the movement to independent living, the changing nature of relationships with family and friends, the differing expectations imposed on us, the new awareness and lost innocence, are all linked to the inheritance of a body that obeys its own laws and drives us in unfamiliar and unnerving ways. All this change propels us into the unknown. We have never experienced this before and the path ahead has not been interpreted for us, so we have to work it out for ourselves. Our old way of Being in the world no longer has relevance, and much of what we had is lost, and most of what we face is new, unfamiliar, confusing and dark.

The existential journey from fertile womanhood, like the earlier transition to sexual maturity, is a rupture with an old way of Being and a journey into the unknown, into a frightening labyrinth of confusion and darkness where change is apparent in every aspect of life. And once again the propelling factor is fundamental hormonal and chemical changes in the body. This is a rare and significant event in a woman's life.

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<sup>5</sup> Suzuki, D. *Metamorphosis: Stages in a Life*. Allen & Unwin, Toronto, 1987. Preface (nnp)

Although this transition is a universal experience for women (who live long enough), this investigation is based within my story, and it has its own texture based in my experience.

Of my experience, I had noticed my body changing almost imperceptibly from the intense bloom of womanhood eight years earlier, which at the time reminded me of a tree putting out flowers in a final attempt to reproduce. The first point of distress which marked the transition in consciousness began with my body and happened suddenly. My journey was prematurely precipitated by injury, which gave me my first real taste of my mortality. Injury alone is enough to change one's place in the world, but this injury and the ensuing brush with death was intimately bound with the hormonal change that comes with ageing.

After injury and illness, and after my monthly cycle began to falter, I no longer recognised my body. It was not mine, I did not know it. I looked the same, but I did not feel the same. I had loved my body; its pleasures, strength and speed. Its erotic, sensual, maternal and violent drives, although sometimes overwhelming gave me passion in my expressions. Suddenly I felt like a mere shadow of this. The rhythms and cycles that once flourished had spilled. Through these cycles I had known myself as woman and felt my connectedness with a bigger world. The loss of these cycles was a source of tremendous grief and sadness – but more importantly this bodily change disconnected me from me – I had lost my way of reading and understanding myself.

Sapped of strength and immobilised – the dangerous, languid creature that used to purr beneath the skin, had turned into a raging screaming harpy. I was subject to a disrespect I had never known before; and often treated as invisible in the world. I burned with a heat that prevented sleep and regeneration. The comfort of daily patterns that could have kept me steady: the patterns of walking, sleeping, physical work, paid work, had changed through physical necessity. Darkness crept into every crevice of my Being. I found myself disorientated, my confidence shattered, my sense of self shredded, and my place in the world changed. Like my earlier transition into maturity this journey was perilous, unwanted and hit at my core – at my very reasons for existence.

Our reasons for existence are essential for life. As Julia Kristeva says: ‘if the meaning of life is lost, life can easily be lost, when meaning shatters, life no longer matters’.<sup>6</sup> This loss of meaning is also related by de Beauvoir as a death in her discussion of the experience of the loss of fertility: ‘When the first hints come of the fated and irreversible process which is to destroy the whole edifice built up during puberty, she feels the fatal touch of death itself’.<sup>7</sup>

I felt this fatal touch of death. It permeated my whole Being. Further, I recognised this death as I had seen my sorrow and grief in other animals – some lambs when weaned would mourn for a long time – some did not recover from the loss and simply died.

For me it was not the very real brush with death that mattered. Although this was frightening, it was tangible and had physical evidence – it was real and understood by others. The death that mattered was the death that was happening on the inside. This death was unnamable, invisible, without form, and apparently ungraspable, yet it was inscribing a crippling fear upon my Being. Not only fear for myself, but for those I loved. With a deeper awareness of my mortality, came a feeling that our time is always ending and an inability to deal with any change at a time when change was rampant. Every change was a source of distress.

This unnamable has been named by Jean Paul Sartre as *nothingness*. Nothingness describes an empty state of being; a being who is purely existing, who is immersed in mere life, not acting upon the world. It describes a walking shell of a human concealing a state of consciousness where one has denied one’s transcendence. Nothingness is to exist in a life with no meaning. Sartre said nothingness lies “coiled in the heart of Being, like a worm”. It inhabits “realities which are not only objects of judgments, but which are experiences opposed, [and] feared”.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Kristeva, J. *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*. Translated by Roudiez, L. Columbia University Press, New York, 1989. p6

<sup>7</sup> De Beauvoir, S. *The Second Sex*. Penguin Modern Classics, Middlesex, 1972. p 588

<sup>8</sup> Sartre, J. *Being and Nothingness*. Citadel Press, New York, 1966. p 21

In cultures based in nature, rite of passage rituals force a confrontation with what is feared thus rendering the worm of *nothingness* benign. Fear helps us escape danger, or prepares us to confront it in a heightened state, but in our contemporary Western culture, fear can take hold, as what is feared has no image or form to confront. To me, what I feared appeared as a black square, a void, an empty space in a forest of confusion.

As social Beings, the construct which frames our understanding of this experience is called *menopause*. Menopause is a clinical term that ‘treats’ this transition as a sickness of the body and the mind with a tableau of hormones, chemicals, creams and surgeries that mask, deny and invalidate the experience. In our individualistic world, this transition has no social value, and it is left to the individual to deal with it alone. Inability to do so is evidence of weakness and worthy of disdain.

Unlike Ancient and Indigenous cultures, where one re-emerged from the rites acknowledged as transformed to assume a meaningful role, our construct of *menopause* provides nothing to move toward. De Beauvoir describes the situation of women moving through this transition in the Western world

Whereas man grows old gradually, woman is suddenly deprived of her femininity; she is still relatively young when she loses the erotic attractiveness and fertility which, in view of society and her own, provide the justification of her existence. With no future, she still has about one half of her adult life to live.<sup>9</sup>

This absence of a future is inbuilt into the word *menopause* itself which defines the experience through its absence – menopause is literally a cessation of menses. In Greer’s social and political analyses of menopause, she chooses to use the word *climacteric*, which was the word that preceded menopause to describe this change. The climacteric is taken ‘from the Ancient Greek word *Klimacter* meaning *critical period*’.<sup>10</sup> Unlike the climacteric that relates something of the existential

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<sup>9</sup> De Beauvoir, S. *The Second Sex*. Penguin Modern Classics, Middlesex, 1972. p 587

<sup>10</sup> Greer, G. *The Change: Women, Ageing and the Menopause*. Hamish Hamilton, London, 1991. p 25

crossroads one encounters in liminal experience, the word menopause is a medical term.

Menopause is a relatively new concept. It was first defined in a medical journal just over a hundred years ago in 1899, under the heading of *Climacteric Insanity*.<sup>11</sup> Women like myself moving through the transition from fertile womanhood, were thus named sick and deranged. Naming this transformation a medical condition ensured that the authority on this transition belonged not to women, nor elders, but to medical practitioners.

This construct of menopause has served to silence the voice of women moving through this transition. As Greer observes

though the literature of menopause is vast, almost none of it is written by women. Most of it has been written by men for the eyes of other men; thousands of middle-aged women troop meekly through the pages of thousands of studies assessing their health, their well-being, their status, their needs....and we hear hardly a word in their own voices.<sup>12</sup>

Our construct of menopause tells us more about the world we live in, our aspirations, our psychology and our values as a group, than it does about the condition of human change and the experience of the movement from fertile womanhood. The dynamic involved to perpetuate this construct requires the complicity of women like myself moving through this transition. As Greer points out

Older women themselves suffer from youthism, and contribute to the prejudice themselves; they endure the never-ending jibes against

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<sup>11</sup> *Climacteric Insanity* was defined in an article titled *Epochal Insanities*, which was Dr Clouston's contribution to a publication called: *A System of Medicine by Many Writers*. France 1899. Greer, G. *The Change: Women, Ageing and the Menopause*. Hamish Hamilton, London, 1991. p 25

<sup>12</sup> Greer, G. *The Change: Women, Ageing and the Menopause*. Hamish Hamilton, London, 1991. p 13

menopausal women ... against crones in general, without a word of protest.

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A rare voice that helped me make sense of the existential experience of this transition was Doris Lessing in her fictional storytelling – *The Summer Before the Dark*.

In this story, Lessing provides a much needed female hero in a world where ‘All our heroines are young’.<sup>14</sup> Kate, her heroine, faces the archetypal ordeal of an internal wilderness and severance from that which went before in her existential search for a presence in the space that was created through loss.

Although we are told Kate’s story, which is uniquely her own, the essence of her transformation is archetypal and told through her dream. In her dream we are plunged into the strange shifting world of unknowing, emotional imperatives, contradictory imagery and altered sense of time which characterise dreams. Kate’s serial dream, by her description, is ‘like a myth’. Like rite of passage myths, her dream is elemental, and speaks of darkness, winter and the labyrinth which resonates with the Ancient and inner language of transformation

Far away behind her, far below the horizon, she knew the sun still shone.  
But it never rose; it had not risen in her sleep now for days, for weeks. She was still travelling north, away from the sun. Ahead of her lay winter, ice, an interminable dark.<sup>15</sup>

The vast cold spaces of winter lead her to a point in the labyrinth where she had a sense of being ‘yards from the centre of a maze, but no matter how she turned and tried, she could not reach it.’<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Greer, G. *The Change: Women, Ageing and the Menopause*. Hamish Hamilton, London, 1991. P 22

<sup>14</sup> Greer, G. *The Change: Women, Ageing and the Menopause*. Hamish Hamilton, London, 1991. P 23

<sup>15</sup> Lessing, D. *The Summer Before the Dark*. Jonathan Cape, London, 1973. p 218

<sup>16</sup> Lessing, D. *The Summer Before the Dark*. Jonathan Cape, London, 1973. p 168

Kate's dream taps the same archetypal root I seek to tap as I give form to the experience of transformation that Kate describes as 'reflections like fire lit shadows on the walls her sleep.'<sup>17</sup>

I recognised my own experience in Kate's bodily and psychic experience, although

Part of the difficulty with *The Summer Before the Dark* is that the climacteric is never identified as a factor ... in Kate's spiritual malaise. In fact her sensations, that a cold wind is blowing on her, that the stuffing is running out of her, that she is being flayed alive, are all typical of the climacteric.<sup>18</sup>

Despite the absence of *menopause* as a stated reason for Kate's transformative experience, this story is important as it gives a voice to the primordial unformed state of transformation where

'psychic chaos' is valued as a reply to 'pre-cosmogonic chaos', ... [where] the return to Chaos is indispensable to all new creation<sup>19</sup>

It is a storytelling embodying the Ancient and Indigenous rite of passage that values psychic chaos as generative of a new creation. As a reflection of the 'the amorphic and indescribable state'<sup>20</sup> of transformative experience, it provides an image of the space between stages of life, that challenges our dominant cultural language of menopause, and moves toward remedying the isolation of this experience.

Our cultural language of menopause was not born in a vacuum. It evolved from a heritage of Western mythologies that has systematically vilified the older woman. This can be seen in the evolving cultural perspectives on the mythological figure

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<sup>17</sup> Lessing, D. *The Summer Before the Dark*. Jonathan Cape, London, 1973. p 133

<sup>18</sup> Greer, G. *The Change: Women, Ageing and the Menopause*. Hamish Hamilton, London, 1991. p 33

<sup>19</sup> Eliade, M. *Symbolism, the Sacred, and the Arts*. The Crossroad Publishing Company, New York, 1986. p 8

<sup>20</sup> Eliade, M. *Symbolism, the Sacred, and the Arts*. The Crossroad Publishing Company, New York, 1986. p 8

of Hekate who remained associated with the broomstick, the cauldron/grail, the night and the moon through out her evolutions.

To some Ancient Greeks, Hekate was an elder, a wise woman – a Goddess at the Crossroads. Homer speaks of her as ‘dear’ and ‘considerate’.<sup>21</sup> Hesiod speaks of her as ‘esteemed’ by Zeus, ‘sitting by reverend kings enthroned, she assists them in judgment’.<sup>22</sup> To the Church Fathers in medieval times, Hekate was feared and loathed, as the evil Queen of Witches in league with the devil. Today, we probably know her best in her mythological form, as the chief witch in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* urging him on to greater atrocities in his quest for power. This demonisation of Hekate’s character since the Ancient Greeks reveals our evolving cultural view that nature is corrupt; that women are not to be trusted; that the natural process of ageing is a corruption of the ideal; and that the body is base, and must be overcome by the mind.



Fig 4: *Witches conjuring up a hailstorm* 1400's. Size, medium and artist unknown

<sup>21</sup> *Hymn to Demeter* by Homer in: Hesiod and Homer. *Works of Hesiod and the Homeric Hymns*. Translated by Hine, D. The University of Chicago Press. Chicago, 2005. p 99-100

<sup>22</sup> *Theogony* by Hesiod in: Hesiod and Homer. *Works of Hesiod and the Homeric Hymns*. Translated by Hine, D. The University of Chicago Press. Chicago, 2005. p 68



Although Hekate was resurrected again as the title of a feminist magazine in the 1970s, the witch is now usually represented in popular culture in a diluted form as a pretty young thing, who titillates an audience, and sets the world to rights. The crone, the old witch, remains an evil presence in fairytales and represents all that we would not want to be – diabolical, mean, and deserving of very bad treatment. In today's world, to be called an *old witch* is to be patronised and out cast as a meddling old woman. (Fig.4)

It is important to note that the elder equivalent of Hekate is not present in the Christian retelling of the rite of passage myth, with Eve in the Garden of Eden who had no elder guidance. This is very sad for us culturally, as the writing out of the elder's role in mythology has left the legacy of taking away personal and cultural aspirations for transcendence as we move toward another age in the life cycle, and has left us without an answer to where we are moving once we have left behind fertile womanhood.

This illuminates the nature of the void that first presented to this investigation. The void is: an absence of that which went before when we knew our place in the world; an absence of a cultural language to guide us through profound change; and an absence of a cultural construct of a meaningful social role to move towards beyond that change.

The title of this investigation *Dark Matter*, names this void. Dark matter not only refers to the existential alienation, my fear that manifested in an experience of *nothingness*, and my movement into the unknown, but it speaks of my intent to journey beyond the visible, into this apparently empty space between stages of life in search of something essential.

In cosmology, dark matter appears as absence, but is thought to be a very big presence.<sup>23</sup> It is thought to make up the universe, being at least 90 per cent of everything, including our body. Apparently there is an entire cosmos of dark

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<sup>23</sup> Walsh, T. *The Dark Matter of Words: Absence, Unknowing, and Emptiness in Literature*. Southern Illinois Press, Edwardsville, 1998. p 4

matter in the nucleus of every cell where matter floats or skittles about like stars. As John Stewart Collis points out ‘It is not easy for us to realise the essential hollowness of things, that we are all hollow men [women].’<sup>24</sup> As science today is beginning to map black holes, voids, dark matter, and see space as a presence essential to existence – through this investigation, I seek to do the same.

What science is beginning to discover – that apparently empty space is essential to existence, is not new knowledge. This is something that has long been recognised in many Eastern and Indigenous cultures.<sup>25</sup> The Australian Aboriginals for example, whilst acknowledging the stars, also mapped the cosmos through its emptiness with a flying emu seen in the darkest point, in the Milky Way.



Fig 5: Diagram describing *Flying Emu* as described in Australian Aboriginal cosmology – location Dark Nebulas.

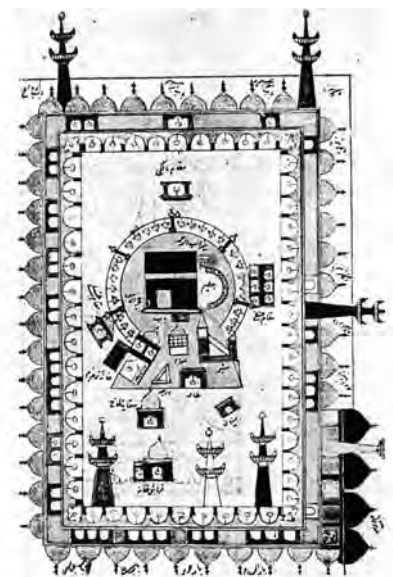
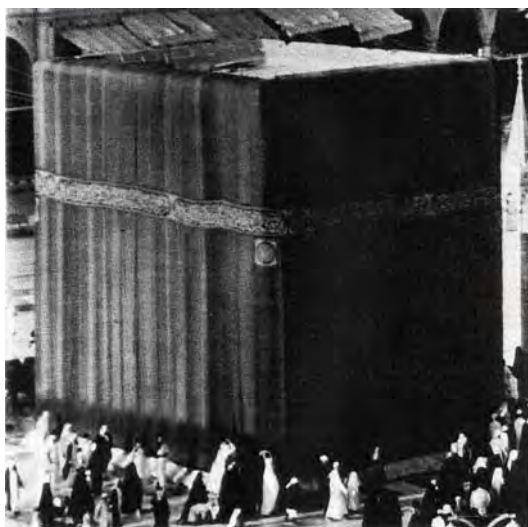
Similarly, the primordial giant black cube, the *Ka’ba* at Mecca is also empty (Fig.6-7). The *Ka’ba* is the liturgical centre of the Islamic world. Lines drawn

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<sup>24</sup> Walsh, T. *The Dark Matter of Words; Absence, Unknowing, and Emptiness in Literature*. Southern Illinois Press, Edwardsville, 1998. p 35-36

<sup>25</sup> In Eastern philosophy the idea of empty space is an integral concept. In the Ancient text, the Tao Te Ching, dated somewhere between 600 and 300 BCE, the void denotes the origin of Being. Similarly Qi (Chi) is a principle concept in Chinese culture, signifying the spiritual energy and life force. This is also represented by emptiness.

through its corners, crossing inside and extending beyond, describe it as the centre of the terrestrial worlds, and the point of intersection in its empty centre is the point where the Heavenly axis pierces the earth.<sup>26</sup> The Ka'ba's emptiness represents the ultimate mysteries of Being that are beyond all categories of thought. It is 'the earthly reflection of the celestial temple'<sup>27</sup> which is also reflected in our innermost Being.



Left Fig 6 : Ka'ba Artist and date unknown. Said to be built by Adam and rebuilt by Abraham  
Right Fig 7 : Schematic image of Mecca – Ka'ba centre. Artist, date, medium unknown.

In the Western world, we see the *outside*; in Indigenous and Eastern worlds they also see the *inside*. The inside space that we view as empty; they view as occupied, integral, and meaningful. Through this investigation I also seek to see the inside space that first appeared as 'nothing', as occupied, integral and meaningful, as it was my intent to enter the void, the apparently empty space between stages of life, to face my experience of change.

Regardless of how badly equipped we are for this journey into the void – change happens – and each of us at a personal level can deny it, and try to remedy it, or we can try to make sense of it and create our own place and meaning in the world.

<sup>26</sup> Burckhardt, T. *Art of Islam: Language and Meaning*. World of Islam Festival Publishing Company Ltd, Kent, 1979. p 3

<sup>27</sup> Nasr, S. *Islamic Art and Spirituality*. Fine Dot Printers, Lahore, 1987. p 43

The choice is essentially to say *no* to life, and have no meaning, and just exist in nothingness, OR to say *yes* to life, face fear, and find meaning in existence.

According to Jung this happens at an essential level

Meaning and purposefulness are not the prerogatives of the mind; they operate in the whole of living nature. There is no difference in principle between organic and psychic growth. As a plant produces its flower, so the psyche creates its symbols. Every dream is evidence of this process.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Jung, C. (conceived and edited), Jung, von Franz., Henderson, Jacobi, and Jaffe, *Man and his Symbols*. Picador, London, 1964. p 53

## **The reactivation of myth**

This space between stages of life which is denied and unspoken in Western culture is very visible, tangible, and meaningful to peoples who view humans as nature. It is embedded in culture, made visible, and understood through myth which is enacted through rites of passage. Although rites vary from culture to culture, the patterns of rites of passage are archetypal

they are without known origin; and they reproduce themselves in any time or in any part of the world – even where transmission by direct descent or ‘cross-fertilization’ through migration must be ruled out.<sup>29</sup>

Myth, and its enactment through rite of passage, thus describes something essential to our human nature from which we have been separated. The rites follow a distinctive journey regardless of the stage of development or the culture enacting the rite. The rites require participation in an ordeal, to undergo a death, from which may spring a rebirth, a new life.

Death and rebirth may mean return to the womb of Mother Earth, and a rebirth into an after life, or in the rite of passage, the rebirth is into a transformed self. The alchemists use the word VITRIOL to describe this experience. Translated it means ‘Visit the interior of the earth; through purification thou wilt find the hidden stone’.<sup>30</sup> This relates the journey into the earth, as a journey into the inner self.

As myth is the Ancient and traditional vehicle to give form, image and story, to the space between stages of life, it would also be my vehicle to speak of my experience. But in a contemporary world where only the relics of rite of passage myths remain, I would have to reactivate myth to make what we would render invisible, visible once again.

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<sup>29</sup> Jung, C. (conceived and edited), Jung, von Franz., Henderson, Jacobi, and Jaffe, *Man and his Symbols*. Picador, London, 1964. p 58

<sup>30</sup> Purce, J. *The Mystic Spiral: Journey of the Soul*. Thames and Hudson, Great Britain, 1974. p 29

From other cultures there is little we can glean that gives specific knowledge of the rite of passage from fertile womanhood as these rites are universally secret and often specific to the initiate. The nature of these rites varies in accordance with the group's cultural constructs, the group's needs and the initiate's aptitude and fears. What the initiate fears most, is what she is most likely to face in this rite of passage.<sup>31</sup> In many cases, an initiate undertaking the rites 'must be willing to experience this trial without hope of success. In fact, [s]he must be prepared to die'.<sup>32</sup>

The secrecy and sacredness surrounding rites indicates a different valuing of knowledge to our Western way. That is, with the knowledge gained through rites comes responsibility, and one becomes a caretaker of that knowledge for future generations. The consciousness surrounding this perspective is embedded in words attributed to Native American origin, 'We do not inherit the earth from our parents; we borrow it from our children'.<sup>33</sup> In the same way, myth is not about nostalgia for the past, but preservation for the future – a way of thinking and Being that is beyond ourselves.

Myth draws from the past; but the rites are defined through their aspiration. The Australian Aboriginals for example often call the rite of passage from fertile womanhood – *the getting of wisdom*.

Like myth and rites, to go forward, this investigation required me to go back to locate the terrain of my myth both in my personal history, and in my cultural heritage.

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<sup>31</sup> 'In Eleusis, north of Athens were celebrated the holiest mysteries of the Ancient world, those of Demeter and Persephone; their initiates were sworn to a secrecy so profound that we know little about them.'

Hine D (translated by). *Works of Hesiod and the Homeric Hymns*. The University of Chicago Press. Chicago, 2005. p 101

Also speaking of the mysteries at Eleusis; 'the women admitted to the sanctuary were compelled to endure one or more initiation ordeals whose form was kept secret'.

Branston, B. *The Lost Gods of England*. Thames and Hudson, London, 1974. p 133

Likewise, Australian Aboriginals have an 'open story' for all, and a 'closed story' for the initiated – the person who becomes the caretaker of the story's hidden meaning.

<sup>32</sup> Jung, C. (conceived and edited), Jung, von Franz., Henderson, Jacobi, and Jaffe, *Man and his Symbols*. Picador, London, 1964. p 124

<sup>33</sup> These words are engraved in stone in the Aquarium in Baltimore, America. They have been appropriated by the Green movement and are often quoted.

My myth-making began in wonderment at the enigmatic figure of the Ancient Greek Goddess Hekate who had been a hovering silent invisible presence in a previous body of work. In the *Homeric Hymns*, the ‘cave dweller’ Hekate acted as a guide to the young initiate Persephone, bringing her out of the passages of Hades from which few return. For the Ancient Greeks, Persephone’s re-emergence into the light-filled world brings an end to earth’s winter. Her yearly return to Hades explains the phenomenon of winter, as her grieving Mother ceases to bless the earth.<sup>34</sup>

I wondered what knowledge or rites equipped Hekate to walk the paths of the dead as if death itself did not exist, ‘No woman knew the paths that linked the earth and underworld better than she.’<sup>35</sup> But her rites remain a mystery – I found no answers. Still, her presence in the archetypal ‘mysteries’ of my own cultural heritage set the path of my investigation and drew a relationship between winter, the earth and my journey.

Winter, like my journey, speaks of drawing into the self to survive transformation. It is an apparently latent season, belying the most profound and secret changes. In winter, above the ground: the skeletal structures of trees are revealed, a carpet of dead leaves lies ready to nourish new life, darkness has its longest hours, dampness lingers in the air, and fires instead of the sun warm us.<sup>36</sup>

Winter’s transformation begins with a necessary death, and death is very real to those who live with the seasons. Lambs born prematurely, seeds sprouting too early, and roaming creatures of the earth have scarce food, and all can easily be killed by the cold. Winter even threatens us in our cushioned constructed

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<sup>34</sup> The story is told in the *Homeric Hymns to Demeter*, published in Hesiod and Homer. *Works of Hesiod and the Homeric Hymns*. Translated by Hine, D., The University of Chicago Press. Chicago, 2005. p 98-114

<sup>35</sup> Calasso, R. *The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony*. Alfred. A. Knopf., New York, 1993. p 221

<sup>36</sup> Fire has its own language of transformation. Fire transforms matter, and its transformational qualities are embedded in myths such as the phoenix rising from the ashes. Cooper, J. *An Illustrated Encyclopedia of Traditional Symbols*. Thames and Hudson, London, 1979. p 66

environments as the weak, the sick and the elderly become more vulnerable. But whilst the world above the ground may appear as a desert of bones, ruins and skeletons, a different world is happening underground in the earth. Winter's life is hidden in the core, in the centre of our shelters, in the centre of our Beings – in readiness for regeneration.

In the Ancient myths in our Western heritage, the rite of passage into womanhood often draws this connection between existential winter and winter on earth, giving a language to that profound change: the loss and the renewal that accompanies change - the passage which begins with a death and ends in a new life – spring.

Many of these rite of passage myths, Ancient Greek, Ancient Egyptian, and Ancient Sumerian tell a story of the Goddess's descent into the underworld. Evidence from Babylon, Greece, Rome and North West Europe suggests that initiates ritualising the fearful underworld journey were required to experience descent into the earth.<sup>37</sup> This mimics the snakes that hibernate underground whose transformation is apparent in the shedding of their skins, and the trees and plants that suck their nourishment into the roots and bulbs to survive winter and renew themselves in spring. These myths reveal the belief in the connectedness of the human experience to the seasons, the earth, plants and other living things. In myth – cosmic, earthly and social orders are one. Myth removes us from the separation of our way of seeing into a realm where all is interconnected.

In our Ancient heritage, this descent into the earth, into the underworld, was considered a return to *Matter*. 'The words *Matter*, *Matrix* and *Mother* all derive from the Latin word *Materia* which means *Substance*.'<sup>38</sup> Carl Jung points out, the image of *Matter* is without any psychic significance for us, but for our Ancient predecessors it encompassed 'the profound emotional meaning of a return to Mother Earth.'<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Branston, B. *The Lost Gods of England*. Thames and Hudson, London. 1974. p 133

<sup>38</sup> Shlain, L. *The Alphabet Versus the Goddess: The conflict between word and image*. The Penguin Press, Great Britain, 2000. p 268

<sup>39</sup> Jung, C. (conceived and edited), Jung, von Franz., Henderson, Jacobi, and Jaffe, *Man and his Symbols*. Picador, London, 1964. p 85



The movement into the earth, the inner being, the unknown, is dark, and this is also associated with the feminine. Black, the darkest of colours can be attained through mixing material/matter of all colours, as opposed to mixing these same colours in light in order to make white. Ancient female deities were often associated with the dark, the night, the darkness of the earth with its caves and grottoes, as opposed to male deities that often were associated with the light and day.<sup>40</sup> Hekate was 'crow black with a shining crown'.<sup>41</sup> Some versions of the fertile Artemis of Ephesus were portrayed as black (Fig.8), as was the Ancient Egyptian Goddess Isis (Fig.9-10). Her colour symbolised; the rich, fertile soils of the Nile; her affinity with the moon; the star Sirius; and by association, the night.<sup>42</sup>



Left Fig 8: *Artemis of Ephesus* Artist unknown. First century.

Centre Fig 9: *Isis* Artist unknown. Dynasty XVIII New Dynasty 1550 – 1500 BC.

Right Fig 10: *Isis suckling an infant Pharaoh* Artist unknown. Ptolemaic date

<sup>40</sup> Shlain, L. *The Alphabet Versus the Goddess; The Conflict between Word and Image*. The Penguin Press, London, 1999. p 268

<sup>41</sup> Calasso, R. *The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony*. Alfred. A. Knopf., New York, 1993. P 221

<sup>42</sup> Shlain, L. *The Alphabet Versus the Goddess; The Conflict between Word and Image*. The Penguin Press, London, 1999. p 268

Witt, R. *Isis of the Ancient World*. The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1997. p 14

Black was also the colour of the heir of Isis, the most sacred Black Virgin who was widely worshipped in the Middle Ages across Europe, from Russia to Spain.



Fig 11: *Our Lady of Montserrat*. Artist Unknown.

So my title *Dark Matter* also refers to this Ancient language of womanhood and affirms the aspirations of this investigation to explore the subterranean landscapes of the earth and the Being. This is in opposition to the Christian myths that aspire to ethereal elevated spaces like the Garden of Eden or Heaven. My investigation rejects the constructs of my culture that instigate the separation of humans from nature. Within the in-between space of this investigation I am seeking to explore our connectedness, searching for something primal and essential to us as animals and as social Beings.

It follows then, that my research methods also reflect my search to acknowledge and affirm our connectedness

The coherent way to investigate any field is to examine its possible relatedness to other things ... Everything is shared by everything else: there are no discontinuities ... Images have sources and antecedents. To turn away from them is to have no image to breath life into.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Summer. F. quoted in Weiss, J (ed.) *Venus, Jupiter and Mars*, Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington, 1980. p 16-17

Myth embodies a way of thinking and expression that enables us to see the ‘whole’. If Jung is right, myth traverses the same realm in the subconscious, which expresses itself through dreams and symbols

Symbols are natural and spontaneous products ...No one can take a more or less rational thought and ... then give it symbolic form. No matter what fantastic trappings one may put on an idea of this kind, it will still remain a sign, linked with the conscious thought behind it, not a symbol that hints at something not yet known. In dreams, symbols occur spontaneously, for dreams happen and are not invented: they are, therefore, the main source of all our knowledge and symbolism.<sup>44</sup>

Thus, the way forward in my reactivation of myth, does not and cannot draw from the intellect alone. Rather, it collapses the intellect into the subconscious that retains many traces from previous stages of development and grasps experiences as a whole.

Dreams draw from this same source as myth, and they are a known, although an undervalued experience in our contemporary lives. In reactivating myth I cannot know what a myth based nature is, but I can know something of my primal nature through dream. As such, my experience of dreams is important to my reactivation of myth. Of dreams Jung says

They originate in a spirit that is not quite human, but is rather a breath of nature – a spirit of the beautiful and generous as well as cruel goddess. If we want to characterise this spirit, we shall certainly get closer to it in the sphere of Ancient mythologies or in fables of the primeval forest, than in the consciousness of modern man.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Jung, C. (conceived and edited), Jung, von Franz., Henderson, Jacobi, and Jaffe, *Man and his Symbols*. Picador, London, 1964. p 41

<sup>45</sup> Jung, C. (conceived and edited), Jung, von Franz., Henderson, Jacobi, and Jaffe, *Man and his Symbols*. Picador, London, 1964. p 53

Inverting this relationship, I seek to get close to the spirit of the ‘sphere of Ancient mythologies’ in my myth through the spirit of dream, and through appropriating methods that collapse our fragmented view. The quality of my voice in my myth thus also appears as a dreamscape, which may seem to the rational mind ambiguous, contradictory and even absurd. It embodies dream’s altered sense of time, and maybe relates the commonplace with a fascinating and threatening aspect.

My myth, like Kate’s dream in *The Summer Before the Dark*, necessarily transgresses the logical linear constraints on our contemporary consciousness to re-engage us with the greater part of our Being that speaks of archetypal experience. This transgression in form is necessary. As Gablik says

if we are ever to change the basis of our experience ... we need to go beyond the limiting patterns built up by our present environment and renew our connection with the collective dream body, with the soul, and its magical world of images.<sup>46</sup>

As such, my myth not only transgresses in subject matter, but it also transgresses in modes of thinking and expression, and forms of telling. Myths based in nature are not literal or static truths. They are metaphors for what lies behind the visible world and are repetitive and ongoing, evolving organically as they are passed on orally and through form and image. Form and image provide a way of telling that obliterates the fragmentation, reduction and abstraction inherent in the written word and enables a holistic, intuitive, relational approach to the telling that describes the whole being.

Leonard Shlain argues, the predominance of the written word in our contemporary culture hardwires our brains to this reductive, abstract and linear thought and comes at the cost of seeing the whole.<sup>47</sup> This is because, unlike images, a written word bears no relation to the object or action it symbolises. In reading, we are

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<sup>46</sup> Gablik, S. *The Reenchantment of Art*. Thames and Hudson, New York, 1991. p 46

<sup>47</sup> Shlain, L. *The Alphabet Versus the Goddess; The conflict between word and image*. The Penguin Press, London, 1999. p 65-68

required to reduce each word to its component parts of letters and then reassemble each letter to make a word. In opposition to this, my myth told through form and image, re-engages with modes of thinking and expression that value the whole, and provide an inherent link to Ancient and Indigenous forms of telling, that have addressed these fundamental mysteries of life and death.

Images have the power to connect us with our pasts, each other and nature – including our Ancient and primal selves. Our contemporary hunger for Indigenous and Ancient imagery and forms is evidence of this. In a world where our primal response lies gagged, and our myths lie buried, these images resonate with us, connecting us with that from which we have been separated. Even if we are not inducted into the meaning of the image, we can still have a fundamental response. Joseph Campbell explains this response

You've got the same body with the same organs and energies, that Cro-Magnon man had thirty thousand years ago. Living a human life in New York City or living a human life in the caves, you go through the same stages of childhood into responsibility of manhood or womanhood, marriage, then failure of the body, gradual loss of its powers and death. You have the same body, the same bodily experiences and so you respond to the same images.<sup>48</sup>

This phenomenon of moving through the cycle of life has been the source of images, forms, and stories since pre-historic times. Essentially we are all born, we all move through transformations between stages of life, and we all die. In our contemporary world, where we disconnect our consciousness from this, my myth seeks to reconnect us with this mystery. The phenomenon of human transformation, and in particular my journey from fertile womanhood, is a primal and essential experience that is as real to us today as it ever was.

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<sup>48</sup> Campbell, J. with Moyers, B.; Flowers, S.(ed). *The Power of Myth*. Doubleday, New York, 1988. p 37

## Contextualisation of the visual work

The artists who contextualise my research have been selected because they draw on myth, or archetypal form, generate works from the body, and/or contribute to a dialogue on feminine experience. At a more essential level they re-affirm connection with our bodies, our heritage, and the world of nature including our Ancient and primal selves. They do not use a paradigm that perpetuates a model of supremacy and separateness; instead their approach to art-making is generative. In this chapter I discuss works by: Rosemarie Trockel, Antony Gormley Louise Bourgeois, Kiki Smith, Anselm Kiefer and Bronwyn Oliver.

Through these artists' works we encounter spaces and subjects which have been undervalued in the dominant cultural narrative. These include: menopause, inner space, the emotional, our animal nature, past injustice, the tragic nature of our heritage and our mortality. They engage us in the mysteries of existence and re-engage us with an experience of ourselves that is whole.

This experience of ourselves as 'whole' is the potential of an aesthetic experience that transcends our fragmented way of Being and collapses the separations between emotion, intellect, and the senses. Ross Gibson in his essay *Aesthetic Politics*, argues that an aesthetic experience has the potential to change the way we experience the world. He explains this process:

An aesthetic experience starts with sensations in the body, providing matters to be contemplated by the intellect, with the effect that your aesthetically induced ideas are deeply felt because you have been moved to think, moved by the sensory impact of the artistic encounter. Sensation has lead to cognition. Conviction has been prompted by emotion. In this movement there's a transformation ... moved by

aesthetics, you feel an urge to engage with whatever experiences the world might offer.<sup>1</sup>

The affirmation of connectedness that characterises the works discussed in this chapter moves us on ‘the inside’. The works and artists discussed contribute to a way of art-making that engenders in us, the possibility of engaging differently with subjects that have been undervalued, opening our world to a sense of connectedness that begins to redress our cultural hardwiring to separateness. They begin to redress a predicament of contemporary existence

Our culture has failed to generate a living cosmology that would enable us to hold the sacredness and interconnectedness of life in mind ... awareness of the whole escapes us.<sup>2</sup>

Rosemarie Trockel’s work *Yes, but* (Fig.12&13) in her exhibition *Post Menopause* for example, engages us on the subject of menopause in a way which is far removed from the cold clinical treatment of it in medical literature. Her work opens us to an experience of ritual and the sacred. She begins my discussion on contextualisation of my work as she provides a rare and strong voice on my subject of the transition from fertile womanhood.

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<sup>1</sup> Gibson, R. in his essay on ‘Aesthetic Politics’ in Seear, L. and Raffel, S. (ed). *The 5<sup>th</sup> Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art*. Queensland Art Gallery Publishing, Brisbane, 2006. p. 18

<sup>2</sup> Gablik, S. *The Reenchantment of Art*. Thames and Hudson, New York, 1991. p. 82



Fig 12: *Yes but*. Rosemarie Trockel 2005

Trockel's title *Yes, but* in her exhibition *Post menopause*, frames our understanding of her installation. The title prepares us to be confronted with works that address what our culture regards as a base experience, yet the work convulses our response as she provides a sacred, sensual and richly affirming view of this transition that speaks to our inner selves. Through this powerful and beautiful work we are re-engaged with the Ancient value of transformative experiences.

*Yes, but* is a thick, tall, wide wall of suspended red wool, and white wool threads. This wall serves as a barrier and an entrance to the exhibition beyond which is a retrospective on her thirty year practice. At the points of entrance, the white wool wall bleeds red at the end of each thread. In other places along the wall, wool spills onto ledges. These gestures may reference the spillage from a woman's body that has been considered obscene for centuries, but in this work the spillage is imbued with reverence and beauty. As Caroline Jones says, 'the exhibition calls for a metaphysical and embodied reading of her presumably ageing body – of work'.<sup>3</sup>

Trockel says of her exhibition *Post Menopause* in relation to her own change

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<sup>3</sup> Jones, C. *Rosemarie Trockel: Museum Ludwig Cologne*. ART FORUM International January 2006. p. 213



There will be art for me after this retrospective; there will be life after my death; there will be pleasure, potential, and production even after (maybe even *especially* after) ‘the change’ as it used to be called.<sup>4</sup>

The wool wall thus serves to separate the works from before her metaphorical death of menopause, in the form of a retrospective exhibition, placing these works inside and apart from the works that will come after. As such *Yes, but* gives physical form to implied rituals that can be seen to occupy liminal spaces between life and death, between the sacred and profane, which are often imagined as doorways through which to symbolically move from one space to the next.

*Yes but* awakens our senses through the soft material of wool, with its elemental colours; with the invitation to plunge our bodies into the wool through deep cavities in the structure; and with the caress of the wool as one participates in the ritual and moves through the metre thick wall into the space beyond.

Once seduced by the senses, and having moved through the wall, one is reawakened to the subject of menopause with a warning sign to visitors “Touch at your own risk! Colour of wool rubs off”.<sup>5</sup> Disarmed and re-engaged through our sense of comedy this statement encourages a transformation in the mind.

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<sup>4</sup> Jones, C. *Rosemarie Trockel: Museum Ludwig Cologne*. ART FORUM International January 2006. p. 213

<sup>5</sup> Jones, C. *Rosemarie Trockel: Museum Ludwig Cologne*. ART FORUM International January 2006. p. 213



Fig 13: *Yes but*. Rosemarie Trockel 2005

The ritual enactment involved in participating in *Yes, but* is also affirmed through the making of the work, which implies ritual repetition. The work evokes the nourishing, healing, feminine rituals implied in the act of spinning and dying, and the repetitive action of carefully suspending what amounts to be one ton of woollen thread.

The processes that underpin the work are as important as the experience of the work itself as they affirm the same values, connecting the work with its genesis. The repetition is also evocative of the repetition found everywhere in nature which resonates a sense of harmony. Ritual repetition is the basis of human ritual practices across the world and through time, and is used to evoke a sense of the sacred, a sense of connectedness with our inner selves and with something beyond ourselves.

The material of wool and its enormous quantity inherently suggests communal connected activity. In Caroline Jones's, words

the nameless numberless females ‘manning’ textile looms, mills, and fibre-wielding machines around the world are called forcefully back into the picture by Trockel’s titular gesture.<sup>6</sup>

This work values materials and processes which have an Ancient root and have been devalued in our more recent history. The use of materials that have feminine associations demonstrates the addition of feminine materials to the fine arts lexicon. This speaks of the relatively new inclusion of women in the fine arts field. Wool has been central to Trockel’s practice and appears in the form of knitting in many of the works installed inside the exhibition.

The subject matter of menopause not only adds to the narrative of women’s experience but also the material of wool engenders and values this new voice.

Instead of the world closing in on the subject of menopause, *Yes, but* opens it out to a connection with the sacred, the ritual, our heritage, feminine narratives, feminine practices and to an engagement based in our senses, including our sense of humour. When we think about the work, it is about making sense of our deeper experience of the work, as Gibson<sup>7</sup> pointed out, the cognition comes after. The connections we make as a response to the work are not dictated, instead they are generated from own aesthetic experience and its resonance with our Ancient and primal natures.

The movement into the space beyond the opening in the wool wall is analogous to moving into inner space. It is this inner space ‘beyond the opening’, which is barely visible to us in our contemporary world, that is the site of my investigation.

While Trockel evokes the experience of the body indirectly, Gormley’s sculptural works derive directly from the body, many of which are based on casts of the body. There is a strong connection here with my work, as my first works begin with the body and the

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<sup>6</sup> Jones, C. *Rosemarie Trockel: Museum Ludwig Cologne*. ART FORUM International January 2006. p. 213

<sup>7</sup> Gibson, R. in his essay on ‘Aesthetic Politics’ in Seear, L. and Raffel, S. (ed). *The 5<sup>th</sup> Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art*. Queensland Art Gallery Publishing, Brisbane, 2006. p. 18

body cast. I speak of his sculptural works generated from the body here, as they acknowledge it is in the body that we first experience change of consciousness, and my first sculptural works are based in the body for this reason. I also share his concerns of body consciousness and the body's potential to relate our interconnectedness with nature and with each other.

As Anna Moszynska points out, Gormley's use of the body came from

insights gained from his earlier visit to India which introduced Gormley to Vipassana meditation – a practice which stresses the body as a channel for awareness and has remained of central importance to him.<sup>8</sup>

This trip also introduced him to a range of esoteric, Indian and mystical texts. These influences are expressed in his works which move beyond outward everyday experience and concern themselves with the spiritual and inner experience.

The motivation for his works and his use of the body, in his words

Comes from the same source as the need for religion: wanting to face existence and discover meaning. The work attempts by starting with a real body in real time to face space and eternity. The body – or rather the place the body occupies is seen as the locus on which these forces act.<sup>9</sup>

His body-based works usually begin with the ritual casting of his own body. This activity, which he values as the matrix for the work, is a living mould, and the activity of casting involves communal participation, which he speaks of as connecting his practice to the Ancient practice of making sculptures that involved entire communities.

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<sup>8</sup> Moszynska, A. *Antony Gormley Drawing*. The British Museums Press, London, 2002. p. 6

<sup>9</sup> Hutchinson. J, Gombrich. E, Njatin. L, Mitchell. W, *Antony Gormley*, Phaidon, London, 2000. p. 120

Through his sculptures Gormley evokes the inner space of sensation, imagination and faith. In empathising with these figures and feeling their sensations, the viewer is also offered this experience that opens to universal connection, infinite space and a sense of stillness that is pregnant with life and wonder.



Fig 14: *Close*. Antony Gormley 1992

An example of this connection can be experienced through his work *Close* (Fig.14). In this work, a paneled bronze body lies on its back, on the ground, with outspread limbs and open palms. Gormley describes this outstretched figure as ‘holding on for dear life ... at this latitude we are spinning at 1000 kilometres per hour through space ... you feel the force ... that threatens to fling us into deep space and the forces of gravity; ... that sympathy between bodies that keeps us stuck down.’<sup>10</sup> Empathising with *Close*, and prompted by Gormley’s description, we can experience through our own body the sensation of being pinned to earth, and wonder at not being flung off the surface of this planet which is hurtling through deep space. The sense of wonder evoked opens the possibility of engagement with mysteries of existence, meaning, and our place in the

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<sup>10</sup> Collins, J. *Sculpture Today*, Phaidon, London, 2007. p. 375

universe. The symmetry and stillness of the body has an Ancient root and also exhibits an affinity with my works.

In effect, Gormley uses sensation and the body as an entry to a deeper level of thought, and in doing so he engages our intelligence as a whole. In this way his works induce us to defy the separation between bodily experiences and rational thought that characterises Western culture. Of this connection, he says

My job in a broken but self-conscious world is to reaffirm connection. The world and my body I must identify as one.<sup>11</sup>

Gormley's valuing of a body consciousness and sensation is also related clearly in his work *Learning to Think*. In this work, five headless figures are set into the ceiling. Gormley suggests we may be viewing these figures as if we were at the bottom of a pool, and that it is us who are enclosed, entrapped, while the figures are floating, rising and liberated. His title *Learning to Think* (Fig.15) suggests that the absence of the head enables the intuitive body consciousness to emerge to the fore. Although Gormley's figures are headless, the suggestion is the heads are protruding through the ceiling, moving through matter. This is similar to the diving bodies in my work which are entering the earth, also transgressing physical boundaries, suggesting a oneness between the figures and the earth into which they descend.

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<sup>11</sup> Hutchinson, J. Gombrich, E. Njatin, L. and Mitchell, W. *Antony Gormley*, Phaidon, London, 2000. P120.



Fig 15: *Learning to Think*. Antony Gormley 1991

While Gormley often bases his work on his body, his works are not strongly autobiographical. By contrast Louise Bourgeois' works are deeply rooted in her personal experience.

Louise Bourgeois is important in contextualising this research as her works affirm that it is possible to use *self* as subject. Also important for me in this regard is the fact that she is not afraid to deal with taboo subjects related to her own experiences with an unflinching honesty.

The underlying motivation for Bourgeois' works is in her unresolved psychological conflict originating in her childhood. She speaks in taboo areas such as those of her murderous intent, her jealousy, anxieties, fears and alienation. She says of her approach

It's not an image I am seeking. It's not an idea. It's an emotion you want to

recreate, and emotion of wanting, or giving, and of destroying.<sup>12</sup>

Although her works are not informed by an interest in myth as mine are, her psychological motivation draws from the same source as myth in seeking visual metaphors to express archetypal experiences. In particular, her repeated making of the *Spider* (Fig.16-17) can be seen as a reactivation of myth through the existential expression of her own personal symbology.



Fig 16: *Spider*. Louise Bourgeois 1996

*Spider* inherently recognises human's connection with other living things, as does myth. Woman as spider has a mythological root, and true to myth, uses that which is not human to describe what is human. The spider is a dangerous creature that could consume its mate. It is one of the few creatures we, as humans, are often truly afraid of, and her webs are something to be marveled at. In Ancient myth she is often seen as the weaver of destiny.<sup>13</sup> The spider is both creator and destroyer.

For Bourgeois, the spider is an expression of her mother whom she admires, for she was as 'clever, patient, neat, and as useful as a spider. She could also defend herself'.<sup>14</sup> The

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<sup>12</sup> Bernadac, M. *Louise Bourgeois*. London, Flarrion Press, 1996. p7.

<sup>13</sup> Cooper, J. *An Illustrated Encyclopedia of Traditional Symbols*. Thames and Hudson, London, 1979. p. 156

<sup>14</sup> Wye, D. *Louise Bourgeois*. Eastern Press, New York, 1997. p. 147



spider is also a self portrait as Allan Schwartzman points out ‘Bourgeois bursts forth as the spider, weaving webs of a life lived as woman, wife, mother, and now woman again, old and strong.’<sup>15</sup> Bourgeois’ own statement bears out this reading of the *Spider* as an expression of self: ‘The female spider has a bad reputation – a stinger, a killer. I rehabilitate her. If I have to rehabilitate her it is because I feel criticized.’<sup>16</sup>



Fig 17: *Spider IV*. Louise Bourgeois 1996

The *Spider* reveals a threatening aspect of womanhood that demands respect and is rarely given form in our contemporary world, although it harks back to our Ancient language that recognised both the powerful destructive aspect, as well as the creative aspect of womanhood. Bourgeois reintroduces us to these aspects of Woman as she renders something of our light and dark nature that is earthbound and primal. Unearthing this existent, but unexpressed aspect of womanhood, provides a much needed voice to human experience and gives refreshing form to the invisible age of the crone. *Spider* is not a victim, nor an impotent old lady, nor is she an aggressor with evil intent. *Spider* is a creature that is vulnerable, demands respect, is the creator of something marvelous and

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<sup>15</sup> Storr, L. Herkenhoff, P. and Schwartzman, A. *Louise Bourgeois*. Phaidon, London, 2003. p. 103

<sup>16</sup> Storr, L. Herkenhoff, P. and Schwartzman, A. *Louise Bourgeois*. Phaidon, London, 2003. p. 140

reveals the formidable presence of age. Similarly fearful animal motifs also emerge in my works in the form of the raven's beak or the Minotaur's horns, and like Bourgeois' works these works have a raw emotional genesis.

Bourgeois' existential expression illuminates silenced experiences, unpalatable emotions and invisible states of Being, that contribute to a dialogue on human, and in particular, female experience. She connects us with our own primal natures, not through intellectual engagement but through emotional intensity, and her use of symbolic form.

In the wake of Bourgeois, Kiki Smith has also been at the forefront of contributing a voice on female experience to the fine arts with her exploration of the female body, its inside and its continuity, and her images that shift from the damaged subject to the healing utopia. But it is her later works which unearth mythological figures and a cultural iconography with their inherent animal/nature/human imagery that particularly relates to my investigation.

Smith's works, like Bourgeois' contribute to the remaking of the idea of woman and reclaim aspects of feminine identity which have been demonised and have disappeared from the dominant cultural narrative. In doing so, she illuminates and connects contemporary experience with its historical root. She says of her works

I always recall Lucy Lippard's remark that 'art recalls that which is absent' because it's as if something needs to be brought into the arena, something that's being unspoken.<sup>17</sup>

Although Smith does not bring to our vision the experience of the menopause, she does image the "Rite of passage from innocence to experience"<sup>18</sup> in her sculpture *Daughter*. In this sculpture, a small maturing girl, cloaked in red, is in metamorphosis having grown the facial hair of the wolf. The work references the fairytale *Red Riding Hood* and the girl

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<sup>17</sup> Isaak J. in his essay 'Working in the Rag-and-Bone Shop' in Bird, J. (ed). *Otherworlds: The Art of Nancy Spero and Kiki Smith*. Reaktion Books, London, 2003. p. 71

<sup>18</sup> Bird, J. (ed). *Otherworlds: The Art of Nancy Spero and Kiki Smith*. Reaktion Books, London, 2003. p. 38

appears as if she has just emerged, fresh from her ordeal, with the dawning awareness of her lost innocence, and the developing awareness that her world has changed. *Daughter* (Fig.18) appears vulnerable and small, although her hair marks her with the knowledge attained through lived experience, and is physical evidence of her animus; her wrath, spirit

and passion. This phenomenon that marks the self with the experience of the ordeal was also something I discovered in my works.



Fig 18: *Daughter*. Kiki Smith 1999

*Daughter* is characteristic of many of Smith's works that collapse our cultural visions of ourselves as separate and superior to other animals. Such works provide us with a powerful way of looking at ourselves from another perspective.

Another example of this can be seen in her life-size drawing *Pietà* (Fig.19), which transposes the Christian figures of the Virgin Mary cradling her beloved dead son to the subject of a woman tenderly cradling a dead cat. It is an image of love, loss and grief that is immediately recognisable. The title, solemnity, and intimacy of the image ensures that our response to the relationship between human and animal is treated with the same reverence as its biblical reference. This image imbues the cat with a soul.



Fig 19: *Pietà*. Kiki Smith 2000

This 'symbolic morphing of animals and humans' takes a variety of explorations in Smiths works. Of this she says

I found this anthropomorphizing of animals interesting; the human attributes we give to animals and the animal attributes we take on as humans to construct our identities .... What do animals mean to us in terms of the construction of our own identity, our well being, our environment?<sup>19</sup>

This question has led to her making a number of creatures who have their origins in myth. Her half human sized, (and smaller) bronze sculptures of *Harpies* (Fig.20) and *Sirens* (Fig.21) morph a woman with a bird. These sculptures are contemporary incarnations of creatures from Greek mythology, which are known for their malevolent intent; Harpies were known for their destructive powers and Sirens seduced sailors to their deaths. In Smiths hands these mythical figures find form as petite, strange, creatures that are eerily human. They appear, fragile and quizzical, yet their titles and their direct gaze remind us of the peril of being seduced by them. 'Extracted from their Ancient world and created in the present, these metal hybrids carry a message of potent femininity and archetypal power'.

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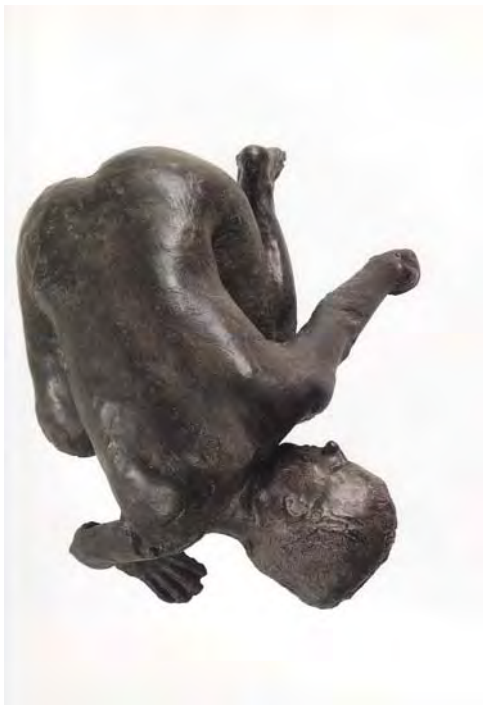
<sup>19</sup> Collins, J. *Sculpture Today*. Phaidon, London, 2007. p. 95

<sup>20</sup> Collins, J. *Sculpture Today*. Phaidon, London, 2007. p. 93

Left Fig 20: *Harpy* 2001.

Right Fig 21: *Siren* 2001

In her image of *Lilith* (Fig. 22-23), the human/animal relationship is explored differently, as the figure is fully human, with spider-like characteristics. Lilith was demonised in Christian mythology as a deadly, lustful woman, and she is also known as the first woman who refused to lie under Adam and escaped the Garden of Eden. In Smith's hands, *Lilith* is rendered naked, black and agile with piercing blue eyes made of glass. She glances warily over her shoulder, possibly assessing potential threats, as she crawls up or down a wall. She is neither evil, nor submissive. She is an incarnation of the Lilith who was an unsuitable wife for Adam as she was equal to him. She is self-possessed and a survivor.



Left Fig 22: *Lilith* 1993.



Right Fig 23: *Lilith* Detail.

The *Sirens*, *Harpies*, *Lilith* and *Daughter* are vulnerable, inspiring our compassion, and dangerous inspiring our wariness and fear, but they are not the 'other', as their untamed animal nature resonates with our own nature. Moved by empathy, sympathy and recognition, we are opened to questions concerning our own natures, and the nature of



being human, at a level that moves beyond our cultural constructs of good and evil.

Through Smith's exploration of the metaphorical relationship between human and animals, we are reintroduced to a language that was culturally suppressed through Christianity, and further suppressed in the course of industrialisation, but is a part of cultures that view humans as nature. Her symbolic morphing of humans and animals reflects the Ancient pattern of revealing what is human through the nonhuman form. Like Ancient works the figures are in metamorphosis and open to multiple readings. She reconnects us with the world of nature including our own nature, and with the Ancient language of womanhood, and the path of demonisation that has led to contemporary perspectives. These elements in her works are also important elements of my works. Like Smith, my expression is motivated by social concerns and my construction of meaning is informed through mythological research.

Another artist for whom myth is central is Anselm Kiefer. His works are monumental, awakening the senses, connecting us with history, myth, and the elements, especially the earth. Armin Zweite says of Kiefer's motivation that he seeks to re-establish a 'primordial unity between man and the universe; to reconcile history and myth'.<sup>21</sup> It is this primordial quality of his works that inspired my initial interest in his work.

From his early works, Kiefer responded to his cultural heritage of being born into post war Nazi Germany. His works addressing this cultural past take the form of paintings/assemblages that depict a war-ravaged land that remind us through what is not there; a vast internal emptiness, and traces of earthly destruction and man-made construction almost devoid of life. These works are scarred with paint and earth. They are collaged with collected remnants such as dead foliage, burnt ash, pressed flowers, metal sheets, a propeller or a chair. Kiefer painted/assembled these works from within a cultural climate where the memories of fascism were being suppressed and silenced, and art making had refocused toward abstraction. To paraphrase Lauterwein, if Mondrian's

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<sup>21</sup> Zweite, A. *The High Priestess*. Thames and Hudson in association with Anthony d'Offay Gallery, London, Great Britain, 1989. p. 67

modernist abstraction that sought light, shows us the tree, Kiefer's response to this era of painting was to plunge us into the roots, and the substrate of culture, of the earth, of that which came before.<sup>22</sup> (Fig. 24-25) Kiefer says of his works

My poetry is vertical and one of its planes is fascism. But I see all the layers<sup>23</sup>

From his 'poetry' that addressed his recent cultural heritage, his vision expanded to confront the Western world with the tragic nature of our shared heritage. This connectedness – the use of absence, the depiction of cultural memory, the valuing of what went before, and the intertextual and interdisciplinary approach is essential to my investigation.

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<sup>22</sup> Lauterwein, A. *Anselm Kiefer Paul Celan: Myth, Mourning and Memory*. Translated by Wilson, D. Thames and Hudson, Paris, New York and London, 2007. p. 24-28.

<sup>23</sup> Lauterwein, A. *Anselm Kiefer Paul Celan: Myth, Mourning and Memory*. Translated by Wilson, D. Thames and Hudson, Paris, New York and London, 2007. p. 23





Fig 24: *Arminius's Battle*. Piet Mondrian 1976

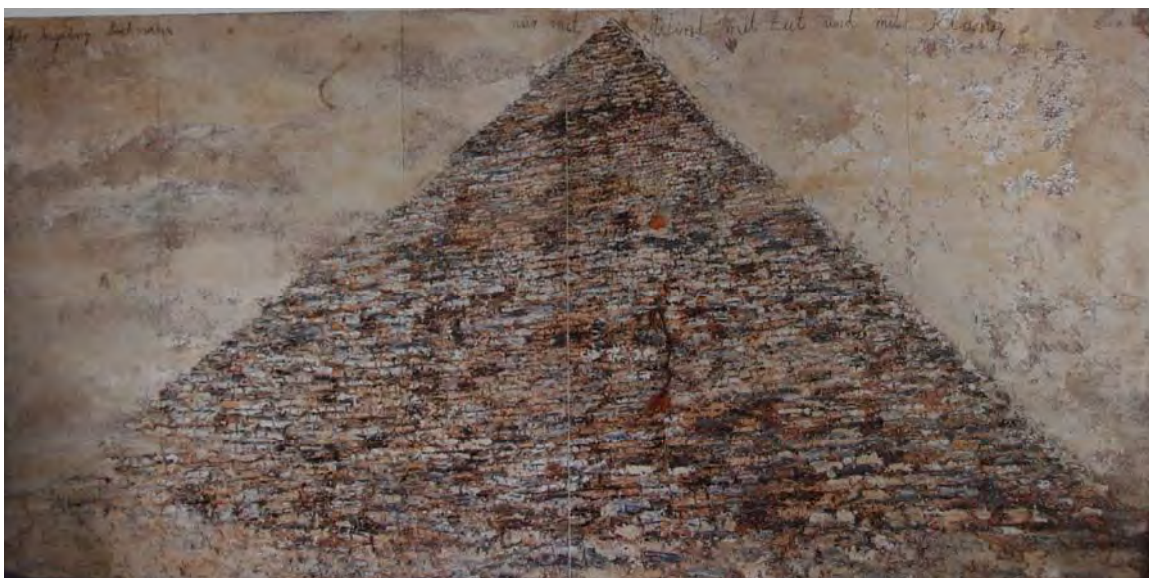


Fig 25: *Only with Wind, Time and Sound*. Anselm Kiefer 1997

The works of Kiefer that have a particular relevance to my project are those that deal with the mistreatment of women as told through myth and history. One realisation of this interest is his work *Women of Antiquity* (Fig.26). Here he tells a recurring story from our heritage of women who were persecuted because their intelligence, strength and their participation in public life was deemed unruly. These women are described through three empty dresses with an identifying form emerging from the neck of each dress. Each disembodied dress suggests the presence of an untamed, self-possessed woman. Their absence may allude to their fates, decapitated and dismembered, as they were subject to horrible deaths, but equally these women take on mythical proportions as a presence that could not be suppressed or contained. Their stained and muddied white dresses speak of death and age, and the spatters of rust paint across the forms can also be read as dried blood. These women, freed of the vulnerabilities of the flesh transcend time to haunt our consciousness.



Fig 26: *Women of Antiquity*

The physical weight of these works and their great circular base connects to the ground as if they were emerging from Mother Earth herself. Their movement is upward. They appear as resurrections, or sacrifices as the form of the dress with outspread arms is also reminiscent of the shape of a cross. At life size they have a larger than life presence. In a group of three they are formidable, telling of their character, and reminding us of the repetition of their persecution.



Fig 27: *Candida*



Fig 28: *Hypatia*

Each figure is identified through a key attribute which transports our understanding. These fragments provide a myriad of references. The Roman Witch, *Candida* (Fig.27), who wore vipers in her hair, is identified through a rusted ball of razor wire Kiefer collected from Morocco. The material has its own history as well as its inherent suggestions of imprisonment and violence. In relation to his other works it references his recurring theme of a tangle of thorns, which is steeped in religious and mythical associations.

The second figure *Hypatia* (Fig.28), an Alexandrian philosopher who was brutally murdered in sectarian unrest, is identified through an irregular shaped and incomplete glass cube. This cube references “Durer’s great etching *Melencolia* of 1514 which



illustrates the renaissance idea that creativity was associated with melancholic states”.<sup>24</sup> The glass suggests fragility and a kind of nakedness that comes with sadness, as if *Hypatia* is exposed in her glass house. Glass is a material formed through heat, and the ashes on the work further the suggestion of fire. The rust paint on *Hypatia*’s skirt also splatters on the cube remembering her death.

The third figure *Myrtis* (Fig.29) is an Ancient Greek poet who was blamed for competing with Pindar. She is identified through a lead book. Lead books are a recurring theme in Kiefer’s works. The weight of the lead book also bares the weight of the history of civilization. The lead is marked with its own passage through time, and its record will evolve and endure long beyond our own lives. The material of lead, which is used in many of his works has its own associations. We use lead to line our coffins to prevent our reconnection with the earth after death and we hide behind lead to protect against nuclear fallout.



Fig 29: *Myrtis*

In Kiefer’s works

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<sup>24</sup> Blunden, J. (ed). *Contemporary: Art Gallery of New South Wales Contemporary Collection*. Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, 2006. p. 274

matter is not used for its sheer materiality but because it manifests itself as a substance laden with meaning.<sup>25</sup>

Meaning is conferred at every level in his works; the materials, forms, surfaces, textures, references, sources and absences all speak for themselves – they have their own histories, and often their voice is in opposition to other elements in the work. *Hypatia* for example, appears as an immortal resurrection, yet she is identified through a fragile glass cube of melancholia.

Kiefer connects us with a history that is dark and disturbing, but none the less essential. Knowledge of the past, and a reckoning with this, is the foundation for a new way of Being to take place. This is analogous to my inner journey that anchors into my own past and the weight of my cultural heritage as a means of preparing for a new way, as movement toward a new stage in life.

Both Kiefer and Smith's motivations to expose our cultural condition, and their forms that are based in myths from our Western heritage illuminate the motivation for my first works, as I make sense of the alienating and fearful experience, and wrestle with the cultural constructs that demonise the experience of change that I seek to tell.

Finally, the work of Bronwyn Oliver is important in contextualising my works, particularly her use of archetypal form, that became an increasingly important element of my later works – which use simple forms such as the egg, the circle, the horn and the spiral.

Oliver's forms are based in nature. They do not draw directly from myths of our Western heritage but they relate forms which have mythical associations and have long inspired people who view human as a part of nature.

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<sup>25</sup> Zweite, A. *The High Priestess*. Thames and Hudson in association with Anthony d'Offay Gallery London, Great Britain, 1989 p. 75

Her works appear as delicate detailed skins, shells, and vessels which may be held in a hand, or they may tower above us. To construct these skins she makes moulds and encases these in a detailed metal network that explores the patterning, order and disorder found in nature. The thousands of strips that make a skin evoke a sense of ritual repetition that imbues the work with a sense of the sacred. In her works, the mould is removed and only the network of metal which describes a skin remains. Her use of the cast retains the presence of the form in nature that inspired the mould, and her final forms realise the remains of the mould. They are traces of that which went before, evidence of loss, death, gestation, and transformation.

Oliver's works evoke a sense of wonderment. She says of her works

I'm trying to create life ... in the sense of a kind of force, a presence, an energy in my objects that human beings can respond to on the level of soul and spirit.<sup>26</sup>

This engagement with our spirit and soul can be seen in her work *Magnolia*. (Fig.30) Here, Oliver encases a small dead tree in a shell that is the shape of an egg. The egg shell is stunningly crafted with hundreds of metal lengths of various widths welded together in a fluid, water-like pattern which is also reminiscent of stylised branches and roots. The tree is only small inside its casing, occupying the same space that a yoke or an ovum might occupy in an egg – suggesting gestation and regeneration – at the place of this death.

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<sup>26</sup> Payes. S, *Untitled: Portraits of Australian Artists*. Macmillan Art Publishing, Melbourne, 2007. p248.



Fig 30: *Magnolia*. Bronwyn Oliver 1999

The context of the work adds to its evocative power. The egg is in amongst living green shrubs and bushes in a lush well-tended botanical garden where all other plants are living, and evidence of death has been carefully eliminated. In the context of eliminating all traces of death which characterises our culture, this work which treats one small dead tree with a touching reverence, serves as a profound reminder of our own mortality and the transience of life, and our tiny place in the scheme of things.

In her visually stunning and poetic work *Vine* (Fig.31), the form evokes the intangible sense of a spirit and soul in a different way. In this work a glimmering giant spiraling form, snakes its way skyward through the atrium of a building, towards a source of light. The form supernaturally hovers above a pool of water. The transformative power of fire suggested through the glowing form is juxtaposed against water, so that the work glimmers from the memory of its making, which originated in fire and water – heat and cold. Like a giant wisp of smoke, that is leaving its origins, this work contains a sense of transcendence. Its snake-like appearance evokes a sense of Ancient myths with the snake's association to the cycle of life, death and rebirth. There is no suggestion that this mythological reference informed the work, but it belies the archetypal nature of her work which has the same source as myth. *Vine* may be a spiritual apparition in the physical

world – a vision after the burning, beyond death.



Left and Right Fig 31: *Vine*. Bronwyn Oliver 2005

Whilst none of my forms take on such giant proportions, the use of the cast and the mould, the skins, the simple forms of eggs, snakes and horns, the inherent absence in her works that speaks of essence, and most importantly the sense of transience of life, resonate with my works. Through Oliver's archetypal forms we are reconnected with the wonder of nature and the mysteries of life and death. We are reconnected with the Ancient language of the spirit and soul.

For the artists discussed in this chapter, connectedness is both a noun and a verb. They connect us at every level: through their practices, which involve ritual repetition, drawing, the cast and the mould, and recurring symbols, and through their subject matter which connect us with previously hidden narratives and open us to questions of meaning as to what it is to be human and exist in this world. These artists generate a language that opens us to a way of Being that begins to transcend the limits of our cultural hardwiring to separateness.



In conclusion, I see the artists discussed in this chapter as contributing to a shift in the fine arts that Catherine Zegher observes in her essay 'The inside is the outside; the relational as the (feminine) space

Whereas modernism's radical and inventive strategies were to be more and more dependant on alienation, separation, negativity, violence and de(con)struction, the twenty first century may well be developing a changed criticality increasingly defined by inclusion, connectivity, conversation, construction, and even healing attitudes.<sup>27</sup>

In short, I see the artists discussed in this chapter as representing a change in the tide that begins to generate a living cosmology, fostering a sense of the interconnectedness of life, the sacred, and developing an awareness of the whole, that Gablik argues is needed in our contemporary world.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Armstrong, C. and Zegher, C. (ed). *Women Artists at the Millennium*, October Books, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, 2006. p. 216

<sup>28</sup> Gablik, S. *The Reenchantment of Art*. Thames and Hudson, New York, 1991. p. 82

## **How the work progressed**

### **Initial investigations through drawing**

Whilst my final submission eventually found form through an installation of sculptural objects, the investigation was undertaken through both sculpture and drawing.

Drawing underpinned my practice. It provided a quick and nourishing way to test and evolve ideas, and it provided a direct and immediate engagement with my senses and my subject. Drawing enabled me to move beyond the intellect and engage with my whole Being to fundamentally change the way I experienced the world. It also provided a means to draw out emotional, psychological and spiritual expression that lay beneath the surface.

My drawing practice took two forms: First, there were drawings in my notebooks which explored works from Ancient, Indigenous and Eastern cultures, as well as forms from nature that resonated with my experience of change. Most importantly, the drawings in my notebooks were essential to the development of my sculptural forms, and often gave form to intangible ideas which emerged and remerged throughout the investigation.

The second form of drawing, which consisted of completed works rather than simply sketches, I consider as a journal on liminal experience, as they document subjects, events, and experiences that held meaning for me in making sense of my experience of change. These drawings were investigative and exploratory in nature and occupied the greater part of the beginning of the investigation. They varied in medium, surface, texture, scale, methods and approaches, as I examined the nature of change, explored possibilities for a visual language that portrayed change, and encouraged subconscious expression. My journal drawings also grappled with the nature of space both as a formal visual device as I sought to draw in new ideas that challenged my Western notions of space as nothing, and as

an existential experience as I faced and entered the apparently empty space that first presented to this investigation.

Initially I viewed this space as a black square, an absence, a fearful search for some missing piece. But through entering this space, and drawing subjects that held meaning for me, my sense of this space changed. Through my journal drawings I began to experience this space as a place that affirmed a sense of self and identity at a more essential level – it harboured my past, my thoughts, my fears and my loves. It was not just a *space*, but an inner *place* of return.

The different experience of time in liminal space also became apparent through drawings, as past, present and future merged in all my drawings. My drawing of *Sebastian* (Fig.32), a lamb I raised, for example, was specific to the time at which it was drawn. It depicted my memory of his bravery, and spoke of my aspiration for the journey before me – to be as brave.



Fig 32: *Sebastian*



Fig 33: *Birthday Flowers*

In regard to change, my drawings brought to my awareness that cross-fertilisation and assimilation are an essential element of living and change. My drawings were harvested from a vast field of disparate sources as I explored the relational as an antidote to separateness. Their origins could be found in my living environment

as well as my history, heritage and meaningful contacts with other people and other living things (Fig.33).

An important part of my process included tracing the sources, antecedents and cross cultural connections of symbols, words, myths and images that related to my current experience of change. This process provided me with a field of connectedness that crossed time and place. As I sought to move beyond the fragmentation imposed by rational thought, the connections I made, and the directions pursued, began with play, were subject to chance and were guided by a sense of what felt right, what resonated and what satisfied.



Fig 34: *Going Home and Sumer Sheep*

Some images like *Sebastian* were drawings from memory; others found their genesis in Ancient subjects like the *Going Home* series (Fig.34), which originated in the reduced and lyrical form of a dignified stone sheep from Ancient Sumer;<sup>1</sup> other drawings like *Hatch* (Fig.35) evolved from old failed works, reworked to describe contemporary experience whilst still other drawings evolved from visual dialogues with friends/collaborators.<sup>2</sup> This metamorphosis of my drawings from

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<sup>1</sup> This evolution of the lithographic image through several printed states is a well trodden exploration and can be seen in Pablo Picasso's *8 states of a Bull*, and Jim Dine's 5 states of *The Plant becomes a Fan*

<sup>2</sup> Throughout the investigation, I maintained a visual dialogue with two friends in particular – this resulted in two collaborative exhibitions. One with Susan Dickson who modeled for the template cast in *Dark Matter*. Our dialogue found form in an exhibition, *Pitch*, which explored the ritual of casting, the containment of the female body and the emotional resonance of a reckoning. The second collaboration was with Patrick Toohey. Our mutual investigation into the *presence of absence* resulted in a collaborative exhibition; *The Telling of X*.

their origins heralded the pattern of repetition and variants that later characterised the sculptural works in *Dark Matter*.



Fig 35: *Hatch*

Through drawing, my notions of change in liminal space evolved from a linear structure that is time-based narrative, to a web-like structure that draws from disparate sources, and recognises its interconnectedness with everything else.

My journal drawings were specifically concerned with changing my consciousness on the nature of space and change, as I literally drew in other ways of seeing space, and formally investigated a visual language that portrayed change. Inadvertently, they also played an essential role in unearthing the substance of my myth. Ultimately my drawings served to prepare me to address my research question, which was concerned with developing a visual language to existentially express the form, pattern and nature of the transition from fertile womanhood. My works eventually found form in the sculptural medium, as my sculptural works exploited the learnings attained through drawing, distilled this broad input, and reduced to the specific focus of expressing my existential experience of change.

## Sweep



Fig 36: *Sweep*

At the time of making my first journal drawings I also made my first sculpture. *Sweep* served to locate the terrain of the investigation in the invisible space between stages life, particularly the transition from fertile womanhood, and set the path for other works to follow.

The work began with a template cast taken from the body of my friend who modeled in a pose that mimicked the divine erect stature of Artemis of Ephesus. (Fig.37)<sup>3</sup> *Sweep* however, evolved into the Ancient Greek Goddess Hekate.

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3 Artemis as Lunar Goddess is portrayed as maiden, mother, or crone (in her aspect as Hekate), depending on where and when she was worshipped. Artemis of Ephesus is the embodiment of fertility. She is steeped in images of the life she protects; she is a living hive of nourishment with her multi-breasted form; and her trumpet flower skirt is inseparable from her form as woman. As Artemis can be seen as a trumpet flower, *Sweep* may also be seen as the dripping form of the deadly hallucinogenic datura flower





Fig 37: Artemis of Euphesus, 130-140 A.D

Artemis is a young fertile version of Hekate the crone. Together they symbolise the cycle of life 'one standing at the beginning of the cycle, the other at the end; one ... connected with young life, and the other ... with death.'<sup>4</sup> The evolution of this first work thus served to embody my passage beyond fertile womanhood.

The evolution into Hekate also reflected my place at the crossroads between movement and inertia. As a liminal Goddess, Hekate was associated with the realm beyond the living world and the places in-between. In Ancient Greece and Rome, it was at 'the crossroads [that] her image could be found'.<sup>5</sup>

*Sweep* is essentially a body melded with a broomstick to make the form of a vessel/dress. Her spilling form is a description of my change, where the fecund ripe shape of woman as vessel, described through history as a dress, spills under the weight of time and gravity to make an organic cone shape.

<sup>4</sup> Gimbutas, M. *The Language of the Goddess*. HarperCollins, San Francisco, 1989. p. 208

<sup>5</sup> Guirand, F.(ed) *New Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology*; Revised Edition. Translated by Aldington, R. and Ames, D. The Hamlyn Publishing Group Limited, London, 1974. p. 166

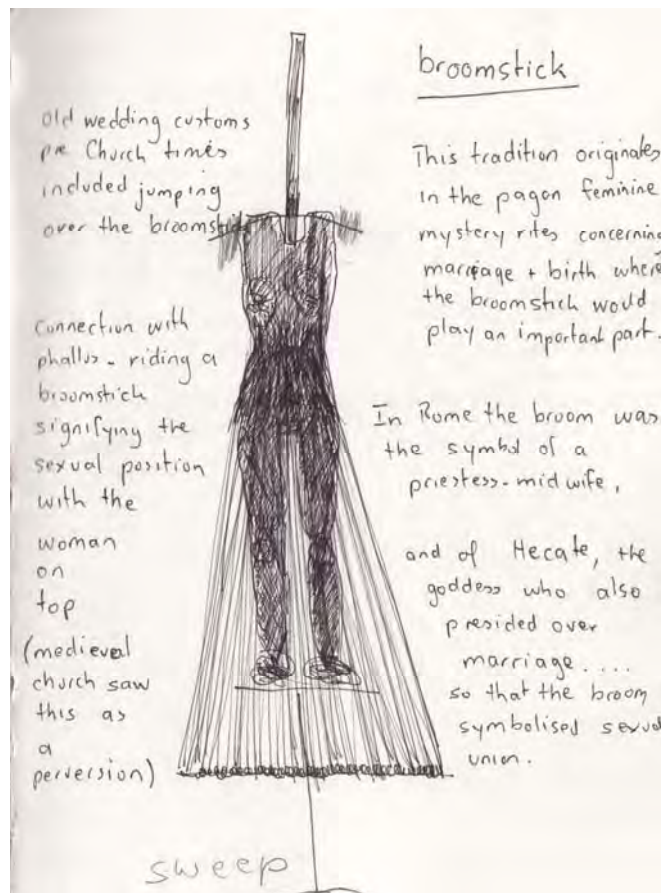


Fig 38: Notebook drawing of Sweep

As broomstick, *Sweep* is a psychological, emotional, physical and metaphysical sweep to make a clean slate that is part of the experience of change. Her story is found in a play on the word and image of 'sweep', and the repeated drawing of a broomstick. At the time, my writing and drawing was an exorcism responding to an internal need to make clean, reflecting my attempts to sweep out the dead and emerging clutter that arose through the chaos and confusion of change – seeking to find some clarity amid the new (Fig.38&39). *Sweep* was a force against the lure of inertia that had held me for some time – her intent, her movement, and her form are of sweeping.





Fig 39: Notebook drawings of *Sweep* broomstick.

*Sweep* is my broomstick; the marriage broomstick of Hekate in her incarnation as elder guide; and the witch's broomstick of her later evolution. In her role as elder guide, Hekate served to illuminate the passages of Hades for Persephone, enabling her to negotiate the paths between Hades and the earth above. She also illuminated this space for me, locating my myth in the subterranean landscapes of the earth and Being. *Sweep's* dark and enigmatic form literally acts as a black hole. When placed in a dark space, *Sweep* soaks up the blackness and illuminates a passage.

The broomstick also recalls the evil witch she became in later eras where the older woman was demonised and vilified rather than respected. This story is written in her Being as she stands erect, supernaturally hovering, whilst simultaneously she hangs from a rope, reminding us of her fate.



Fig 40: Details of *Sweep*

These traces of her heritage illuminate our contemporary rewriting of the passage into the later age of the crone as socially repulsive. *Sweep* anchored into this heritage and identity from which we have been separated. In making *Sweep*, I was affirming connection with our Ancient past. I was writing this Ancient past, and the passage of demonisation, back into Being towards shedding light on contemporary culturally formed attitudes that poison our response to the experience of ageing.

As an heir of this heritage I was also recording my contemporary experience of moving into this transition. *Sweep*'s dark, frayed and vulnerable form gives a voice to the terrible and alienating experience of being out of accord with my group.

*Sweep*'s origins are necessarily in the body as it is through our bodies, our senses, our passage of life, that we experience ourselves as nature, even though our constructs hold us apart from nature. And most importantly, this change of consciousness is initiated and first experienced in the body. As change originates in the body, so this first work in my submission also originates in the body.

The work began with the ritual of casting the body, to make a template cast (Fig.41). Instead of using this template cast to mould a figure, I cast the inside space of the template in a way that preserved the absence of the cast allowing the work to retain the Ancient language of woman as vessel. The body of *Sweep* is a skin that occupies the same space that the skin of the human body once occupied.

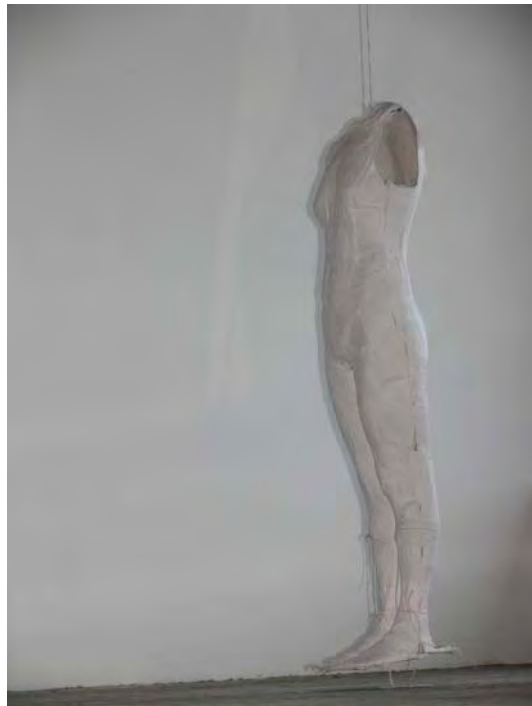


Fig 41: Template body cast

The absence in *Sweep* may speak of a loss of that which went before, and the absence of a contemporary language that makes sense of this change. But the absence also speaks to my subject of transformation as it suggests a gestation or a

death, as if *Sweep*'s body has left its casing leaving only the lingering presence of the body in the form of a skin.

A sense of fragility is preserved in *Sweep* as the work exploits the marks and deterioration inherent in the casting process. Although she retains the living, breathing presence of her origins, she is also cracked, marked and frayed with her own passage through time.

Like all other works in *Dark Matter*, *Sweep* is unformed, in-between, metamorphosing. She is present and absent, self assured and vulnerable; self-possessed and persecuted; dark and illuminating; Ancient and contemporary: She is a dress, a body, a vessel, a flower and a broomstick.

At the time of making *Sweep*, I was also drawing the forest raven. *Sweep* has raven black skin and the multiple lines on her body and threads of her skirt seek to imitate the glimmer of a raven feather. This association in my myth was born of my encounter with the forest raven.

My drawing *Onegammyeye* (Fig.42) records the memory of this encounter.<sup>6</sup> Onegammyeye had one white gammy eye which distinguished him as I heard and watched him grow up in the care of his parents. At the time of his weaning he flew down and stood, and strutted on the bench beside my chair. Intensely curious, he examined me with his one good eye, poked at my glass, hopped over my feet, and my hands. His bone black beak came so close to my face I was afraid he would pick out the glistening object that was my eye. He was beautiful and impressive; sleek, strong, muscular, and massive like a barrel. He was the richest, deepest black that glimmered.

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<sup>6</sup> In the drawing *Onegammyeye*, I was experimenting with drawing movement and actual change, drawing from memory, and becoming aware of the negative space as a space which is active and alive. I built up the work like I was modeling in clay and let the image emerge. I had taken my lessons from Susan Rothenberg. I had been impressed by the psychological weight her works, and how she distilled something primal and essential through her images based in memory. I was also interested in her use of negative space and her explorations of actual change.

The Native Americans say the raven is a messenger from the void, and a visit from a raven is an omen of a change of consciousness (Fig.43). In retrospect, I associated this visit with the life threatening injury I incurred the next day. Onegammyeye, for me marked the entry into the void – into the liminal space of change. From this encounter, the raven became important to my myth, and hints of the raven permeate the works in *Dark Matter*.



Fig 42: *Onegammyeye*

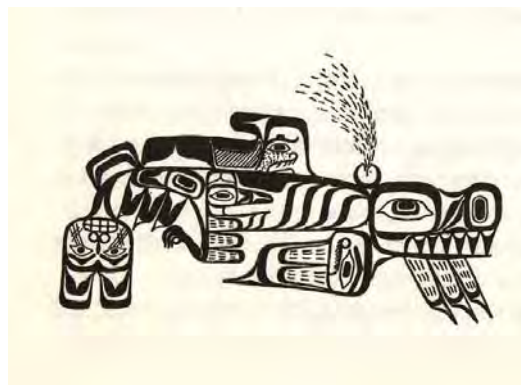


Fig 43: *Raven God in the void of the belly of a whale.*

## Return



Fig 44: *Return*

My next sculptural work, *Return* went through a long period of gestation. As with *Sweep*, the initial investigation for this work was conducted through drawing.

In unearthing my myth through drawings, I constantly found myself looking back to past experiences of change to make sense of current change. This awareness led me to cast a favourite doll from my childhood and make a template for her dress. I soon abandoned this work as the doll held none of the presence or wonder she once had, and the dresses were too small and looked like lampshades (Fig.45). This attempt made me aware that I needed a doll, a surrogate, who related to my current size.

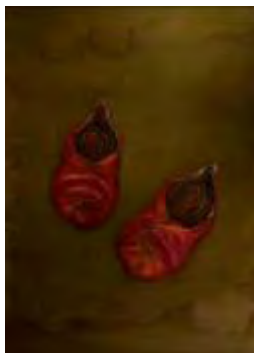






Fig 46: Detail of silver box and marbled skin of *Return*

The hooped skirt which emerges from the body is a repetition of the form in my drawing *My Steel Dress*. This drawing was a part of a series *On Absence* (Fig. 47-50) which explored absence as a space pregnant with meaning.



*On Absence*

Fig 47: *My Red Shoes* Fig 48: *My Steel Dress* Fig:49: *Grandma's Gloves* Fig 50: *Shu Yi*

The origin of the drawing was in a ritual gold grail from Ancient Mycenae that had been inverted and redrawn to make *My Steel Dress*. Although I had decided to work at a human scale, the form remained true to the origins in the drawing – to the Ancient grail.





Fig 51: Wine Cup (Mycenae) 16<sup>th</sup> Century BC  
 Fig 52: *Return* Studio shot of design drawing and body and skirt

In *Return*, the upper body and the skirt together provide an image of the grail, yet the grail is only described through lines providing evidence of what was, alluding to my loss of fruitfulness. It suggests the emptying of the cup of cornucopia. The ambiguity of the grail form gives rise to a myriad of readings including, the latitude and longitude lines on a map of the earth and an inverted dome. When lit from above, *Return* casts a spider's web shadow.

The form, plunging into the black square spaghetti-fies<sup>7</sup> as matter does when it enters a black hole. The glass and wooden rods which make up the base also read as the inside structure of a stem. The form revisits the flower, and it was also the skeletal structure of the neatly shaped winter trees that I passed daily. They too were returning to the earth.

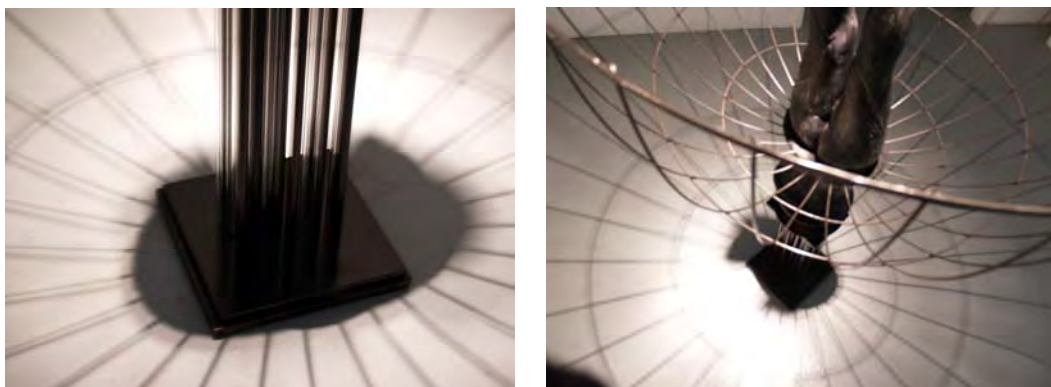


Fig 53: *Return* (black hole and spiders web shadow)

<sup>7</sup> In astrophysics, *spaghettification* is a term used to describe the elongation of matter as it stretches and enters a black hole.

## Plunge



Fig 54: *Plunge*

My next work, *Plunge* also grew from the sketch in my notebook that inspired *Return* (Fig.56). Whereas the sculpture *Return* expressed a greater sense of vulnerability than the sketch, *Plunge* expresses the sense of liberation embodied in the original drawing.

This second body has not been ravaged by time. It is sleek and unmarked apart from wash marks on her body as she plunges into a reflective black pool which is high above the ground. The shape of the splash, described through the metal rods also takes inspiration from a cup shaped flower, and a satellite dish. (Fig.56)

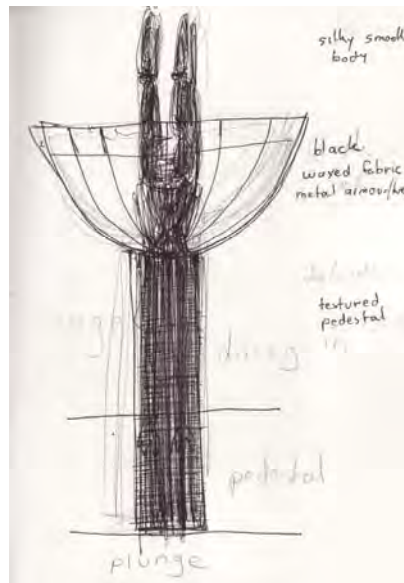


Fig 55: Notebook drawing of *Plunge*

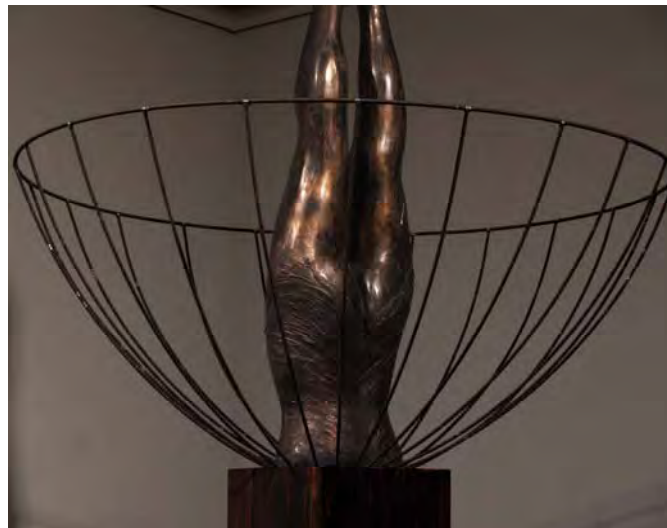


Fig 56: Detail of *Plunge*

The stem of *Plunge* is made from boards that describe the internal structure of the stem, and reference an affirming dream of kneeling on floorboards. Some time after making *Plunge*, I used fire to brand this wooden stem with the cup-shaped sheep brand from the farm on which I grew up. As brands and tattoos mark a passage of life and speak of belonging and identity, I was marking her with my origins. (Fig.57)



Fig 57: Branding images Studio shots

Both *Plunge* and *Return* seek to engage the viewer in the experience of disorientation, disintegration and unknowing. They occupy a mythical in-between space – between sacred and base, between lost and becoming. The figures were born of my intent to return to Dark Matter, and value my experience of transition. They speak of grief and loss, and resonate with the dark and Ancient language of womanhood re-awoken and made anew. Depending on how you approach the figures, they may be stamens of a stylised flower, or figures joyfully and expertly diving into water, or plunging and spaghettifying into the earth, or they may be bleak, decapitated, dismembered remnants of misuse.

Both plunging figures are engaged in a subversive play. They both feel classical yet they are not quite right. The works are on a plinth like Ancient Greek sculptures, except it is not elevating the icon of rationality, the noble head. Instead, the headless body is in the air as I value the base, primal and bodily sensation. In place of the pristine white marble skin that we now associate with the Ancient Greeks, these figures are dark, elemental and possibly sinister. The ideal perfect body, the terrain of the Greeks, is replaced in my work by a metamorphosing body; one is a rake-like waif, and the other which is closer to the earth, is a fleshy woman, scarred, inscribed, and patterned with her origins, her dreams, and her passage through time. *Return* and *Plunge* literally invert the classical values of rationality and bodily perfection to reveal my myth of human

transformation that is dark, bodily, based in nature and is both Ancient and contemporary.



Figs 58: *Plunge*, *Return* and shadows.

The welding and the branding involved in making *Plunge* and *Return* was a return to elemental and primal processes using heat and cold to manipulate materials. This resonated with the experience of the transition from fertile womanhood, where heat generating friction inherent in change permeates every aspect of life, emotions run high, and the body burns, then freezes. My connection with heat led me to explore the possibility of actually making works with fire through casting metal. However, the cost, coupled with my pleasure in manipulating and transforming plaster led me to abandon this.



## Eclipse



Fig 59: *Eclipse*

My next work *Eclipse* was a repetition, reduction, and transformation of the form of *Return*. The body having sunk into the earth, the cup remains and is sliced in profile to reveal a crescent moon that doubles as a set of horns (Fig 60).



Fig 60: Studio Shot

The association with the moon had been present in my drawings and had begun in my sculptural works with the initial *template cast* from which *Sweep*, *Return* and *Plunge* were made (Fig.61). Its origins in Artemis of Ephesus and its evolution into Hekate recognised they were ‘a lunar goddess of the cycle of life with two aspects’.<sup>8</sup> The circular skirt of *Return* also referenced the moon as it was made of 28 steel rods marking the number of nights in a moon cycle.



Fig 61: *Mothers Love*

The moon is an Ancient symbol that has been written into mythologies on the basis of its constant renewal and perpetual cycle of life and death. It is also associated with women through its explicit connection with a woman’s monthly cycle, which connects human experience with the rest of the natural world. The moon’s gravitational pull governs the rise and fall of earth’s tidal waters and the cycle of fertility in many other creatures, plants and organisms. Its pull is elemental. The eclipse of the moon in this work may liken my loss of a monthly cycle to the bird that is said to be in eclipse when it loses its breeding plumage. The eclipse also suggests a death in the moon’s cycle and the possibility of renewal.

The crescent moon in *Eclipse* is dark, not luminous, and the space between the crescent describes the shape of a half or full moon, that once was. The different phases of the moon suggested in the work acts as a metaphor for the phases in life

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<sup>8</sup> Gimbutas, M. *The Language of the Goddess*. HarperCollins, San Francisco, 1989. p. 208

– from Artemis to Hekate. The presence of shadowed or absent moons suggests the in-between terrain of the investigation where all is unformed and in metamorphosis. The title *Eclipse* furthers this suggestion.

An eclipse is “an obscuring of the reflected light by the passage of another”.<sup>9</sup> It is an in-between phase characterised by the deprivation of light, and the emergence of a new presence. This idea is furthered through viewing the work as horns. Like its predecessors, the movement in *Eclipse* shows both upward and downward force. The horns of *Eclipse* may be seen as resurrecting – they certainly were in my drawings. Equally, the once abundant cornucopia sucks its goodness back into the earth retaining a dark bone-like quality. *Eclipse* may evoke a sense of loss, but it also begins the emergence of a menacing and formidable presence.



Fig 62: *Eclipse* (detail of lunar horns)

The central form of *Eclipse* is held in place with wings that cradle the form in its upright position. These wings relate to *Flying Blind*, an earlier experiment in etching where two-30 second drawings were etched and layered over each other in different configurations to relate the experience of the wild, blind flying in inner space. (Fig.63) The wings were carefully carved and lined with the kangaroo fur.

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<sup>9</sup> *Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary*; Fourth Edition, Oxford University Press Melbourne, 2004. p. 441





Fig 63: *Flying Blind*

Whilst skins and furs, hold specific meaning for cultures based in nature, often imbuing the wearer with the powers of the animal – the kangaroo fur in *Eclipse* has a personal meaning (Fig.64). Until adulthood I slept under kangaroo skin rugs, and as a child I wore kangaroo skin suits to protect against the cold. They were snug, warm and soft. The smell and the touch of the fur in *Eclipse* arouses these memories, pays homage to the animal from which it was taken, acknowledging a past where the entire animal was used if it was killed. The use of the skin acknowledges death and its role in sustaining another life.



Fig 64: *Eclipse* (detail showing bone like quality and fur)

*Eclipse* also marks a transformation in the narrative of *Dark Matter*. It is the first work to depart from the figurative form of the body and reduce to forms that distill the symbolic associations of the works that preceded it. *Eclipse* begins the emergence of archetypal form to give a voice to the primeval experience of death and resurrection.

The next work *One Thread* was made at the same time as *Eclipse* and is a further reduction of form. *One Thread* is as light as *Eclipse* is dark.

## One Thread



Fig 65: *One Thread*

*One Thread* began with wrapping a ball of copper welding wire. I was interested in this material as it was used in the welding of the previous works. It had the transformative potential of fire in its properties, and I was seduced by its colour and quality. I had been given a small reel that had been rendered useless for welding as it had been exposed to water.

My intent was to make a small sculpture that had its genesis in an Ancient Islamic vase that had evolved into drawing called *Re-ignite* (Fig.66-69). It was one of the

first works I conceived in this investigation where electrical wires attached to a tiny dress form would serve to reignite her – to wake her up to face existence.

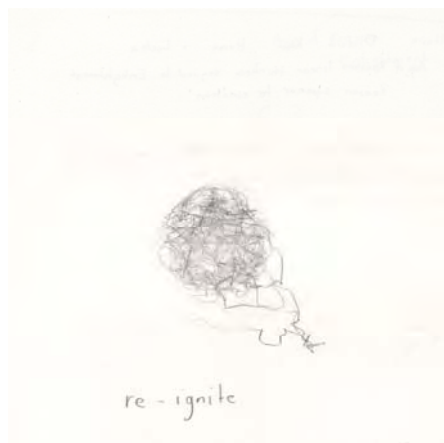


Fig 66: Top left. *Pilgrim Flask*      Fig 67: Top Right. Notebook drawing of *Pilgrim Flask*  
 Fig 68: Bottom Left. Notebook drawing of *Re-ignite*.      Fig 69: Bottom Right. *Rupture*

As often happens in sculpture, the material determined the form. I could not make the intended form as the material was high tensile and refused to bend in the jagged lines of *Re-ignite* – it would only wrap and thread. I continued with the wrapping and threading of the form as it offered the healing and nourishment embedded in repetitive action. I was revisiting the wrapping of the rope that made *Sweep's* skirt; thinking of one thread and its suggestions of connectedness: storylines; bloodlines; the passage of one life – it's twisting and turning upon itself, where the outer form is dependant on the inner form. (Fig.70)



*Fig 70: The One thread of Sweep's skirt*

Encouraged by the emerging glimmering cosmos that related to the hemisphere lines of *Return* and the moon in *Eclipse*, and fully realised the circle which had been present in all previous works, I bought a reel of welding wire, determined to make a ball from one thread. This ball would hang from one thread, like a spider hangs from its web, suggestive of the idea of our lives hanging from a thread.<sup>10</sup>

The reel of thread was fifteen kilograms and heavy to move. The work had to proceed carefully as the wire threatened to spring off the reel in a giant coil which would be irrecoverable. The making was accompanied by a repetitive thud at each lift and turn of the reel.

The labyrinthine analogy grew as the form grew (Fig.71). It marked a rite of passage, a return to the earth, a death at the centre, and possibly a rebirth into a transformed self. In the wake of the horns of *Eclipse*, I was particularly reminded of the Minoan Crete labyrinth, as at its heart is the slaying of the Minotaur, a

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<sup>10</sup> *One Thread* connects with myths that associate spinning and weaving with the moon. In Ancient Greek, Egyptian, Dogon, Norse and Japanese myths for example, the Goddess with Lunar attributes spun the webs that wove together the earth, sky, sea, and human destinies. They created cosmic order in ensuring the endless cycle of life, death and renewal – As Artemis they ‘drew thread from their spindles to create life’ – as Hekate they ‘cut the thread to bring about death’. Andrews, T. *Legends of the Earth, Sea, and Sky: An Encyclopedia of Nature Myths*. ABC-CLIO, Santa Barbara, 1998. p. 224  
Gimbutas, M. *The Language of the Goddess*. HarperCollins, San Francisco, 1989. p. 208



facing and slaying of fear itself. In making *One Thread*, I was winding Ariadne's thread, which could also be the thread in William Blake's poem *Jerusalem* which also speaks of the labyrinth

I give you the end of the golden string,  
Only wind it into a ball,  
It will lead you in at Heavens Gate  
Built in Jerusalem's wall.<sup>11</sup>

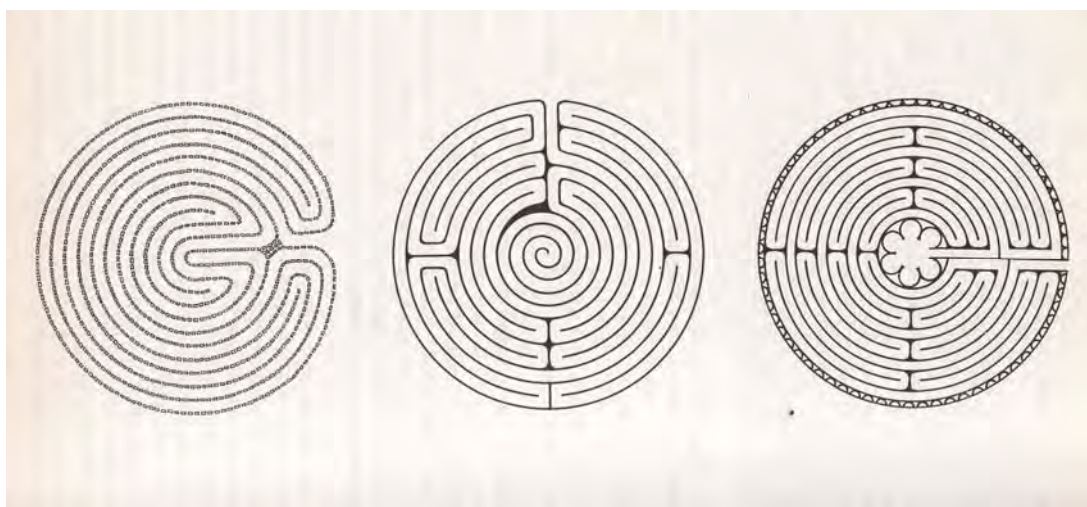


Fig 71: Drawings of three mazes

Left – Finnish stone maze (Bronze age)

Middle – 19<sup>th</sup>-Century British turf maze

Right – the maze (in tiles) on the floor of Chartres Cathedral

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<sup>11</sup> Purce, J. *The Mystic Spiral: Journey of the Soul*. Thames and Hudson, Great Britain, 1974. p. 28

## Metamorphosis



Fig 72: *Metamorphosis*

Although often intricate in form, the labyrinth is a spiral, and one which returns. Whilst *One Thread* has the complexities, turns and wraps of the labyrinth, the next work, *Metamorphosis* was reduced to one return. It was one turn of a circle, a spiral, a life cycle and the archetypal form of regeneration – the *ouroboros*.



Left Fig 73: A representation of the Ouroboros from a third century B.C Greek manuscript

Middle Fig 74: *Path to Spiritual Enlightenment* Kim Hoa TRAM, 2005.

Right Fig 75: Ouroboros of Dahomey, West Africa.

*Metamorphosis* was a visual resolution to the words, *hole* and *whole* – two words which sound the same, are spelt nearly the same, but have opposing meanings. The circle was a form that was both whole and hole, with its completeness and its emptiness. This seemed to reflect the paradox of entry into the void or nothingness, to search for meaning, affirm connectedness, to face existence – to make whole. This is also the paradox of the labyrinth. You negotiate the twists and turns of the labyrinth to reach its centre and what you find at its heart is yourself.

The form of *Metamorphosis* is made of mussel shells. I had collected the shells as their shape, when opened, was a butterfly whose metamorphosis from a caterpillar is astounding. I had been pondering the changes that happen in the cocoon – ruptures and evolutions – each small change emerging from the last change until the creature emerges totally transformed, yet it is made of the same stuff. The space inside the cocoon I likened to the space of this investigation.

The shells were literally my subject of transformation as they were the remains of a creature eaten and transformed through our bodies. ‘What you eat is always something that just a moment before was living.’<sup>12</sup> ‘The butterfly – the inner space is only known after the mussel has died and sustained another life. The mussel/butterfly serves as a reminder that there is no life without death.

<sup>12</sup> Campbell, J. with Moyers, B. *The Power of Myth*. Edited by Flowers, S. Doubleday, New York, 1988. p. 173



When the butterfly shells were placed inside each other, the form spiraled to resemble an eel, a millipede or a snake, providing another generation of the metamorphosis: from mussel, to butterfly, to snake.

The snake itself is an Ancient symbol written into mythologies, based on its death wielding and regenerative powers. It features in many creation myths from the Australian Aboriginal Rainbow Serpent to the Ancient Greek copulating snakes. The regenerative aspect of the snake is apparent in the shedding of its skin and in its re-emergence from the earth after winter hibernation. The forms and associations evoked through *Metamorphosis* combines these concurrent presences of life, death and regeneration.

The name *Metamorphosis* was inspired by Marina Warner's entry on *metamorphosis* in her open-ended dictionary in the exhibition catalogue of *The Inner Eye*, where she observes Western images over the last 500 years. She observes

... hell's punishments metamorphose sinner's bodies through the devil's food chain, whereas in heaven, the elect will be reunited with their unique, entire, unchanged individual body.<sup>13</sup>



Left Fig 76: *Satan Devouring one of his Children*. Francisco de Goya, 1820-23  
Right Fig 77: *Lucifer*. Artist unknown, 1512.

<sup>13</sup> Warner, M. *The Inner Eye: Art beyond the Visible*. National Touring Exhibitions organised by the Hayward Gallery London, Cornerhouse publications, London, 1996. p. 65

*Metamorphosis* not only refers to my meal of mussels, to the snake eating its tail, but confronts us at a very base level with the knowledge that each living thing, including ourselves, will metamorphose through the food chain – through this never-ending cycle (Fig.78).



Fig 78: *Lioness Devouring Boy*. From the palace of Assyrian King Ashurnasirpal II

*Metamorphosis* may serve to bring to our awareness our strange way of seeing – that demonises change as unnatural and evil – whilst we culturally aspire to an impossible unchanging body, even after death.

My next work *Voice* isolates and enlarges the head of the snake in *Metamorphosis*.



Fig 79: *Metamorphosis* (Detail of snakes head)

## Voice



Fig 80: *Voice*

*Voice* was based in fury and aimed to do damage. It emerges from the ground as a violent wave designed to pierce the third eye. In welding the armature for this piece the spike was lower than I intended, so it ended up piercing the voice box rather than the eye. I did not correct this, as it was appropriate. This work had given me a voice when I had been rendered mute with rage.

Anger is a powerful force to change what is not working, toward finding a new way that prepares for the future. The raw emotional genesis of *Voice* provided the immense energy needed to burst forth from the earth, as a bulb re-emerges from the soil, heralding the coming of spring. It is significant in the narrative of *Dark Matter* as it begins a phase of re-emergence.

Despite the new and menacing presence of *Voice*, this work's form is anchored in the early shapes of *Dark Matter*. It is the raven's beak, the organic cone shape of the skirt of *Sweep*, the horn and tip of the crescent moon of *Eclipse*. It is also an

enlarged and inverted repetition of the horn of *Void*, and it is a thorn of *Spine* – two works (Fig. 81-82) that resulted from my early metal casting experiments at the forge.



Fig 81: *Spine*



Fig 82: *Void*

Although the forms are the same, the scale and positioning differ, and with that, the experience of the work and its meaning has been altered. With the inside space no longer visible, *Voice* is no longer feminine and receptive. Instead, *Voice* declares its presence as a threat, showing its most damaging and dangerous aspect. *Voice* is sharp, piercing, masculine and phallic. It shows a force that is willing to fight for existence.

With the making of *Voice*, the masculine fearful forms such as the raven's beak and the Minotaur's horns are no longer the 'other' in my myth-making. *Voice*, as an image of self, shows that which was opposed and feared, and thought of as the 'other', is now being recognised, and accepted as a part of self. *Voice* is an inclusion of the masculine part of identity, and shows a willingness to use its voice toward renewal. At its base, the latent force of the egg remains unseen.



Fig 83: Spider web armature



Fig 84: Skin of *Voice*

As a thorn, *Voice* relates to the earlier works in *Dark Matter* that could be viewed as flowers, which are the transient, fertile reproductive part of the plant. This later work has isolated the thorn which is not seasonal, but is essential in its function to protect the plant, for the life of the plant. It has moved the sense of identity away from being defined by loss of fertility and moved to identify with the dangerous protective part of the plant.

The next work *Semi lunar* was cast from *Voice* and continues the function of protection and the phase of re-emergence.



## Semi lunar



Fig 85: *Semi Lunar*

*Semi lunar* presents two forms, but it suggests a singular form that is half submerged. It is a crescent moon rising and the beast with horns emerging from beneath the ground.



Fig: 86. Buffalo Skull

Whilst *Semi lunar* shares its form with *Voice*, the angle of its casting, its doubling/mirroring, surface, and texture ensure the experience of the form is quite different. Rather than the steely cold spike of *Voice*, *Semi lunar* has a warmer earth-aged surface of rusted metal. It is covered in feminine fabric folds that also

appear as the stylised layering of a horn, and suggests water washing around the form. These folds create a lyrical, lively, swirling pattern embodying the generative force of becoming (Fig. 87). Unlike *Voice* which presents its most threatening aspect, *Semi lunar* is more assured in its power and voice, and less aggressive.



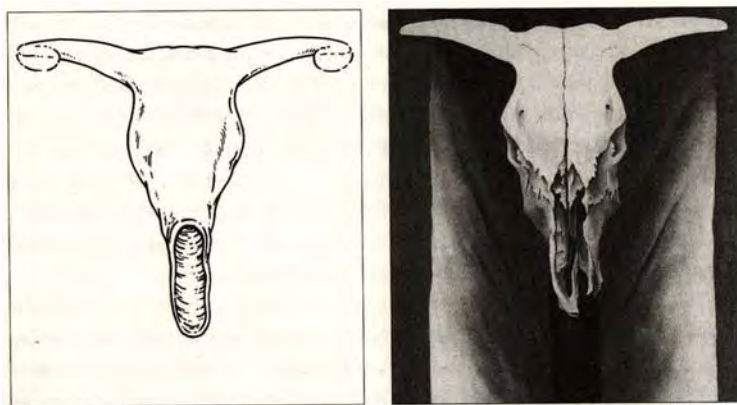
Fig 87: Surface detail of *Semi Lunar*

The double horns and the stylised patterning of *Semi lunar* were not new in the investigation. This form and patterning relates back to very early drawings such as the horns depicted in the horn/hair of *Trouble*, and the *Going Home* lithographs (Fig.88 & 34). In these later works the horn forms have been isolated and enlarged, as if existent aspects of my myth are called to the fore in times of need.



Fig 88: *Trouble*.

My horns, like the horns in many Ancient works are associated with regeneration and becoming. This age old and persistent connection has been credited with the similarity of the shape of a bull's head and horns to that of the uterus and fallopian tubes in the female body (Fig.89). This connects the bull, the reproductive organs and the regenerative waters<sup>14</sup>— a connection of interest to me as my works are intimately connected with fertility.



Above Fig 89: Schematic of vagina, uterus, fallopian tubes and Ovaries compared to Georgia O'Keefe's Cow's Skull —Red, White, and Blue, 1931.

Below Fig 90: *Venus of Laussel* 'The woman with the horn' C 20 000 – 18 000 BC



*Venus of Laussel* dated 20 000 BC overtly suggests this relationship as she holds a horn in one hand, and touches her belly with the other (Fig.90). Her horn is similarly patterned to mine. Such connections did not overtly influence my myth, although the persistent recurrence of this connection through the ages leaves me

<sup>14</sup> Gimbutas, M. *The Language of the Goddess*. HarperCollins, San Francisco, 1989. p. 265



wondering at the scope of Jung's definition of archetypes as biologically grounded.<sup>15</sup> For me – I first became aware of the horn's association with re-emergence through my drawing *Snow*, (Fig .91) where the unexpected addition of horns to a lamb/dog came with the awareness that the creature would not submit to the winter cold.



Fig 91: *Snow*

The title *Semi lunar* not only refers to the submerged crescent moon. It takes its name from the two powerful valves placed at the two exits from the heart that serve the function of preventing blood flowing back into the heart – if they fail, the result is lethal. Like its namesake, *Semi lunar* protects the heart, the centre, and serves as a barrier to return. In the context of *Dark Matter* it gives ritual and symbolic form to an entrance or exit, serving much the same purpose as its Ancient predecessor the Ancient Cretan *Horns of Consecration* (Fig. 92).

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<sup>15</sup> Campbell, J. with Moyers, B. (Edited by Flowers, S.) *The Power of Myth*. Doubleday, New York, 1988. P51



Fig 92: *Horns of Consecration* 1500 BC. *Sacred horns and sacred peak.*

The gateway of *Semi lunar* is experienced differently depending upon the direction from which it is approached. If approached from within, with the horns lying back, one walks over the submerged head of the Minotaur, or crest of the moon, and slips into a flow as if passing through the valve with the blood. If the work is approached from the other direction, one encounters the greater threat of the spikes, and has to negotiate the path without being pierced. The space between the lunar horns is essential to the work. It draws the shape of an egg in negative space, but more importantly it is charged and activated by the experience of moving through it.

The negative space which is important to the experience of *Semi lunar* is also an essential element of the next work *WHole*, which evolved from the making of *Semi Lunar*.

## WHole



Fig 93: Receding voids of *WHole*

When making *Semi lunar* I noticed that the lunar horns could be entwined to make a single form. (Fig.94) The desire to bring these forms together, and reveal their mysterious inner space that spiraled out of view, led to the conception of this last work. This work would revisit my original questions of space with a new perspective, and remember the paradox of hole and whole that generated my first explorations.



Fig 94: Studio shot of *lunar horns*

To envisage and refine this form, I returned to my drawing practice. I drew the inside of shells; the spiral of a sheep's horn (Fig.95); and the inner spiral of the nasal cavity in a sheep's skull.



Fig 95: *Scroll*

To make *WHole*, I cast the horn of *Voice* and combined it with the circular cast that supported the making of *Metamorphosis*. I then manipulated this form through several castings.

The resultant work goes through a wall. One side of the wall shows an egg that sweeps into two inner voids – the other side shows the emergent outer form of these voids. (Fig.93 & 96).



Fig 96: Emergent forms of *WHole*

The egg had been a latent force, a hidden presence in many of the works in *Dark Matter*; from the structural ellipse at the waist of the body based works, to the shadow of *Metamorphosis*, through to the footprint of the lunar horns of *Voice* and *Semi lunar*. The egg had also been present in my drawings from the very beginning. In *WHole* this latent force, had been isolated, and for the first time exerts full influence. Like an egg, it harbours a germ of a new creation and has the potential for a new life – a new way of Being.<sup>16</sup>

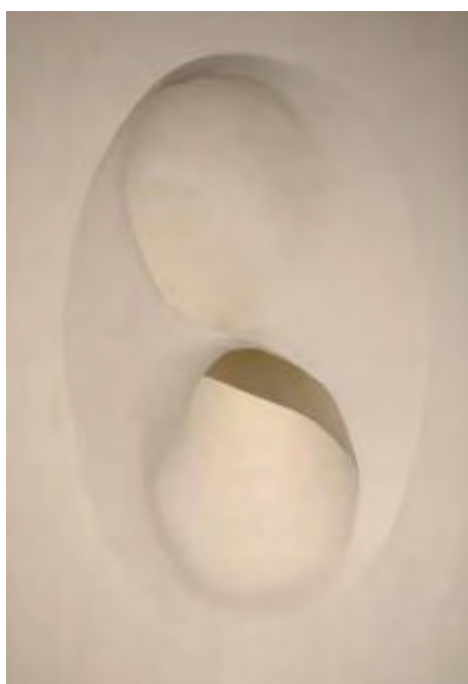


Fig 97: Receding voids of *Whole*

Unlike the egg which is pregnant with matter – this egg contains two receding entwined voids that spiral and revolve around each other.(Fig 97) This space mimics the life-affirming spiraling of the drapery of *Semi lunar* made manifest not in texture, but in hollow space. It is also the helix form of a DNA strand, whose generative force resonates with the Ancient Greek myth that described the beginning of everything. For the Ancient Greeks the world and time was conceived as a result of endless spiraling coitus of the snakes, Time-Without-Age and Ananke.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> In synchronicity with its predecessors in Ancient and even prehistoric art, the egg is symbol for becoming, regeneration, and recreation.

Gimbutas, M. *The Language of the Goddess*. HarperCollins, San Francisco, 1989, p. 213

<sup>17</sup> Calasso, R. *The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony*. Alfred. A. Knopf., New York, 1993. p. 199-201

The inner spaces of *WHole* are silky smooth, coated in earth ochre, that suggest a warm inner glow. The voids offer the possibility that any sound entering will resonate within, asking for a whisper or a song.

In *WHole*, the line that separates the two voids in the egg draws an image of an elongated Taoist yin yang symbol, which speaks of balance and harmony (Fig.98). Like the Taoist symbol it has two manifestations, although it is one in essence.

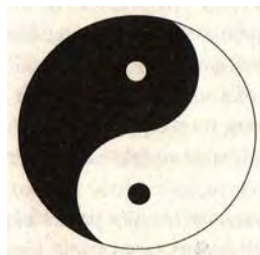


Fig 98: Yin Yang Symbol

This symbol is also suggested in the form that emerges out the other side of the wall, which appears as two mammalian-like, horn-shaped forms entwined, embracing. They provide an image of home, self and love. In luminous blues and greens on an earthy rusted surface they emanate a sense of life and joy. Emerging out the other side of the wall they are breaking into the world of light – re-emerging into the field of time and space where everything is dual.<sup>18</sup> This form is replicating itself like the mitosis of a single-celled creature splitting into two.

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<sup>18</sup> 'Everything in the field of time and space is dual' from Campbell, J. with Moyers, B.; Flowers, S.(ed). *The Power of Myth*. Doubleday, New York, 1988. p. 50



Fig 99: Emergent forms of *WHole*

*WHole* literally evolves from the *nothing* of two spiraling voids, to *something* as two snuggling creatures. This phenomenon is described in the Ancient Taoist text, the *Tao Te Ching* and reflects the Taoist belief that the void is the origin of Being.

Reversal is the movement of the way;  
The creatures of the world are born from Something, and Something from  
Nothing<sup>19</sup>

The re-emergence of the *hole* in the narrative of *Dark Matter* is significant. The *hole* remembers the first experience that threatened my life and existence as it manifests in space, the ‘worm of nothingness’ that lies coiled in the heart of Being. The *hole* also acknowledges, that we ourselves are mostly made of holes – that the *whole* and the *hole* are interdependent aspects of the same thing. In *WHole*, it is the ‘hole’ that completes my re-emergence and completes the

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<sup>19</sup> Lao-Tzu. *Tao Te Ching*, Translation of the revised Ma Wang Tui Manuscripts by Lau, D, C. Edited and introduced by Allan, S. Everymans’s Library, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1994. Te Ching 4. p 6

narrative of *Dark Matter*. It brings the receptive feminine back into view, without sacrificing the force of the masculine horns that enabled reemergence.

*WHole* is also a return to the first work *Sweep*. The inner entwined voids of *WHole* read as an exit and entry to the labyrinth and remember the existential crossroads that lead to the making of *Sweep*. The space inside *WHole* enabled completeness, but it also harbours the memory of the empty space in *Sweep* that hinted at death and gestation. Emerging out the other side of the wall, the organic cone shape of *Sweep*'s broomstick skirt has doubled and evolved into two entwined horns. In this last work, *WHole* has returned to its origins - to its point of entry – the same but different – in a transformed state.



## **The form and pattern of *Dark Matter***

I had not intended that the journey through my works depict the archetypal passage described in transformative myths. Nonetheless, the passage of works which existentially expressed my journey saw the re-emergence of this age-old pattern. The passage of myth is given visual form in the labyrinth. It is a spiral into the void, a finding at the centre and a return. In my works this return could be seen as the organic cone shape of *Sweep's* skirt which disappeared from the narrative re-appear as lunar horns as the journey began a phase of re-emergence. The circle, sometimes elongated into an egg, was present in every form and fully realised in the centre of the myth as a compressed, solid and glimmering Alchemist's 'hidden stone'.

The evolution of works was one of a move from figurative forms toward more pared back archetypal forms. As the narrative moved from existential loss and my culturally constructed identity toward the more essential facing of mortality, and a reckoning with self – the form accordingly reduced to something more essential. At the point of re-emergence, the forms began to split in two, in premonition of the world of dualities that lies beyond this space.

The way begets one; one begets two; two begets three, three begets the myriad creatures.<sup>20</sup>

While the forms became increasingly elemental, each form is a repetition and variant of the form that preceded it, or came after it. The circles, eggs and the organic cone shapes recur throughout. With the use of the cast and the mould, later works actually evolved from works which preceded them and these forms themselves were repetitions of elements present in the drawing. Repetition and variants are the basis of fractal mathematics which describes the way nature operates, and can be seen in the repetition and variants of trees on a hill, or planets in a cosmos, or people on the earth. This pattern in nature can also be seen in the

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<sup>20</sup> Lao-Tzu. *Tao Te Ching*, Translation of the revised Ma Wang Tui Manuscripts by Lau, D. C. Edited and introduced by Allan, S. Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1994. p. 7

repetition and variants found in myth, where each archetypal myth around the world is a variant of another myth from somewhere else. These myths that generate from our common bodily experience express our primal nature. The different texture of the myths reflects the psychology, values and aspirations of various cultures, but the form of the myth remains the same. My myth is a repetition and variant of an age-old story.

The transformative experience described through repetition and variants was embedded at every level in the works and their making; from their conception where works morphed and changed through repeated notebook drawing; to the sculptures where works morphed and changed in their making as I responded to the material with which I was working; through to their installation where shadow drawings generated from the works changed the works again. But the final transformation is in the viewing. The ambiguities of the forms, spaces, shadows reflect the in-between, unformed, nature of things in the void, and open out to a myriad of readings, allowing the space for the viewer to bring their own experience to the works.

## Conclusion

My intent in undertaking this investigation was to voice and value my existential experience of the transition from fertile womanhood. Through this investigation I sought to re-engage with the wonder of transformative experience through moving beyond the constructs of separateness from nature that characterise Western culture and tell my story through the vehicle of myth which inherently relates our connectedness. Toward this end, I looked to nature and to image, forms, and stories of cultures based in nature to find another way of experiencing the world that would enable me to embrace the mysteries of archetypal experience.

The initial studio-based research focused on changing my consciousness on ‘space’ and ‘change’, as it was the liminal *space of change* that was invisible to me, that I was seeking to make visible. These investigations were undertaken through drawings that grappled with the nature of space, explored possibilities for a visual language that portrayed change, and encouraged subconscious expression. Through journal drawings I began to experience space as a presence – and change as a natural state of Being. Inadvertently these drawings also unearthed the substance of my myth.

My drawing practice essentially prepared me at an intuitive level to address the question of this investigation which was concerned with developing a visual language to existentially express the form, pattern, and nature of the transition from fertile womanhood. My works ultimately found form in the sculptural medium, appropriating the divine mythological language of the Ancients. Sculpture made real, physical, large and in three dimensions an expression of different existential experiences as I moved through this transition. The sculptural works involved a dialogue with material, form, negative space, surface, texture and shadow of each expression. The initial sculptures found their origins in my notebook drawings where I had maintained a record of my existential experience of change. Later sculptures grew from earlier sculptures.

Fundamentally, the journey in liminal space expressed in my sculptural works was one of return.

I attain the utmost emptiness;  
I keep to extreme stillness.  
The myriad creatures all rise together  
And I watch thereby their return.  
The teeming creatures  
All return to their separate roots.  
Returning to one's roots is known as stillness<sup>21</sup>

As the last sculptural works demonstrated a return to the point of entry into liminal space - the journey into liminal space was also one of return. This return was to my past, my home and to the deeper past of my heritage. Paradoxically, this return generated the force to move forward.

The return was also into inner space. Not the empty space, nothingness or absence I initially feared – but a return to a place that harboured my thoughts, memories, aspirations, dreams, fears and loves. It was a return to a place where we construct meaning and face existence.

The journey was also one of a return to primordial chaos where all is unformed. The works in *Dark Matter* defy a linear reading as they immerse the viewer in a matrix where everything is connected to everything else. Each form, negative space and shadow echoes other elements in the spaces of *Dark Matter*. In *Dark Matter*, shadows take on a life as the unformed seeds of the Mother forms; the works themselves are also unformed, in-between, metamorphosing. Their oneness with the rest of the world is suggested as they move through matter - through walls, ceiling or into the floor. Despite the metamorphosis within each work and the metamorphosis between works, the works themselves are utterly still.

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<sup>21</sup> Lao-Tzu. *Tao Te Ching*. Translation of the revised Ma Wang Tui Manuscripts by Lau, D, C. Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1994. Verse 60 of the *Tao Ching*. p. 64

The sculptural works expressed the paradoxical nature of my experience of change: to enter the hole, to make whole; to undertake a journey, yet simultaneously experience no passage or linear time; to generate creation through a return to chaos; and to move forward through a going back.

Through the works in this submission I have sought to contribute to the fine arts field a visual expression of feminine experience, specifically the ‘undescribed’ experience of the transition from fertile womanhood. This is my primary contribution, but this expression is connected to a bigger picture. It embodies a more essential valuing of the space between stages of life – the chaos and confusion that characterise transformative experiences, not as sick and deranged, but as generative of new creation. It is also connected to contributing to a visual language that does not deny our nature, but rather renders something of our light and dark natures enabling us to experience the *whole*.

The work of artists Rosemarie Trockel, Antony Gormley, Louise Bourgeois, Kiki Smith, Anselm Kiefer and Bronwyn Oliver, provided a context in which to locate my works. Like these artists, through my works, I hope to contribute to a paradigm that moves beyond a negative critique on injustice and, instead, contribute to the generation of ‘a living cosmology that [will] enable us to hold the sacredness and interconnectedness of life in mind [and] ... awareness of the whole.’<sup>22</sup>

This living cosmology in my submission of *Dark Matter* has at its heart an affirmation of humans’ interconnectedness with the rest of nature. It makes visible a return to a primordial place in our past and in our inner Beings where *Matter*, *Matrix* and *Mother Earth* once again share one meaning.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Gablik, S. *The Reenchantment of Art*. Thames and Hudson, New York, 1991. p. 82

<sup>23</sup> Shlain, L. *The Alphabet Versus the Goddess: The conflict between word and image*. The Penguin Press, Great Britain, 2000. p. 268



## **Appendix I**

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## **Appendix II**

### **List of Illustrations**

#### **Introduction**

Fig 1: *Red Felt Vessel Dress*. Janelle Mendham 2001. Paper, rope and felt, 150 x 130 x 130cm.

Fig 2: Works from *The Shadow Gardens*. Janelle Mendham 2004  
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Fall Plaster and muslin. 260 x 140 x 60cm.  
Prowl Plaster, muslin and wood, 240 x 120 x 60cm.

Fig 3: *Solitude* Janelle Mendham 1979. Acrylic paint on canvas, 120 x 94cm.

#### **Central concerns of the research**

Fig 4: *Witches conjuring up a hailstorm* 1400's. Size, medium and artist unknown. Image from the Morgan, G. and Morgan T. *The Devil: A visual guide to the demonic, Evil, Scurilous, and Bad*. Chronicle Books, San Francisco, 1996. p 138.

Fig 5: Diagram describing Flying Emu as described in Australian Aboriginal cosmology – location Dark Nebulas. Image from [http://www.areavoices.com/astrobob/images/Emu\\_nasaimages\\_org\\_outline.jpg](http://www.areavoices.com/astrobob/images/Emu_nasaimages_org_outline.jpg)

Fig 6: *Ka'ba* Artist and date unknown. Image from Nasr, S. *Islamic Art and Spirituality*. Fine Dot Printers, Lahore, 1987. p 43. Includes reference to Adam and Abraham.

Fig 7: Schematic image of Mecca – Ka'ba centre. Artist, date, medium unknown. Image from Nasr, S. *Islamic Art and Spirituality*. Fine Dot Printers, Lahore, 1987. p 43

Fig 8: *Artemis of Ephesus* Artist unknown. First century. Image from Belan, K. *Madonnas From Medieval to Modern*. Parkstone Press, New York, 2001. p. 16

Fig 9: *Isis* Artist unknown. Dynasty XVIII New Dynasty 1550 – 1500 BC. Image from Scamuzzi, E. *Egyptian Art in the Egyptian Museum of Turin*. Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, New York, 1965. plate XXXIV (nnp)

Fig 10: *Isis suckling an infant Pharaoh* Artist unknown. Ptolemaic date. Image from Witt, R. *Isis of the Ancient World*. The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1997. p. 67

Fig 11: *Our Lady of Montserrat*. Artist Unknown. Image from Belan, K. *Madonnas: From Medieval to Modern*. Parkstone Press, New York, 2001. p. 27

### Contextualisation of the visual work

- Fig 12: *Yes but*. Rosemarie Trockel 2005. Image from [http://www.artnet.de/magazine/reviews/vonpape/vonpape11-14-05\\_detail.asp?picnum=2](http://www.artnet.de/magazine/reviews/vonpape/vonpape11-14-05_detail.asp?picnum=2)
- Fig 13: *Yes, but*. Rosemarie Trockel 2005. Image from [http://www.artnet.de/magazine/reviews/vonpape/vonpape11-14-05\\_detail.asp?picnum=1](http://www.artnet.de/magazine/reviews/vonpape/vonpape11-14-05_detail.asp?picnum=1)
- Fig 14: *Close*. Antony Gormley 1992. Bronze, 188cm. Image from Collins, J. *Sculpture Today*. Phaidon, London, 2007. p 375
- Fig 15: *Learning to Think*. Antony Gormley 1991. Lead, Fiberglass and air, 5 body cases, 173 x 106 x 31 cm each. Image from Hutchinson, J., Gombrich, E., Njatin, L., and Mitchell, W. *Antony Gormley*. Phaidon, London, 2000. p 38-39
- Fig 16: *Spider*. Louise Bourgeois 1996. Steel, wall relief 203 x 180.5 x 53.5 cm. Image from Storr, L. Herkenhoff, P. and Schwartzman, A. *Louise Bourgeois*. Phaidon, London, 2003. p 36
- Fig 17: *Spider IV*. Louise Bourgeois 1996. Steel, wall relief 203 x 180.5 x 53.5 cm. . Image from Storr, L. Herkenhoff, P. and Schwartzman, A. *Louise Bourgeois*. Phaidon, London, 2003. p 37
- Fig 18: *Daughter*. Kiki Smith 1999. Paper, bubble wrap, cellulose, hair, fabric, and glass, 121.9 x 38.1 x 25.4 cm. Image from Bird, J. (ed). *Otherworlds: The Art of Nancy Spero and Kiki Smith*. Reaktion Books, London, 2003. p 168
- Fig 19: *Pietà*. Kiki Smith 2000. Drawing ink on Nepal paper. 162 x 81cm. Image from Ahrens, C. *Small Sculptures and Large Drawings*. Hatje Cantz, Munich. 2001. p 46
- Fig 20: *Harpy*. Kiki Smith 2001. Bronze 78.7x58.4x43.2 cm. Image from Collins, J. *Sculpture Today*. Phaidon, London, 2007. p 91
- Fig 21: *Siren*. Kiki Smith 2001. Bronze 13 x 14 x 14.5 to 25 x 17 x 8 cm. Image from Haenlein, C. *Kiki Smith: All Creatures Great and Small*. Krestner Gesellschaft, Berlin and New York, 1999. p 53
- Fig 22: *Lilith*. Kiki Smith 1993. Bronze and glass 33 x 27.5 x 19 inches. Image from Bird, J. (ed). *Otherworlds: The Art of Nancy Spero and Kiki Smith*. Reaktion Books, London, 2003. p 44
- Fig 23: *Lilith*. Kiki Smith 1993. Bronze and glass 33 x 27.5 x 19 inches. Image from Ahrens, C. *Small Sculptures and Large Drawings*. Hatje Cantz, Munich. 2001. p 88
- Fig 24: *Arminius's Battle*. Piet Mondrian 1976. Oil on canvas, 245 x 112 cm. Image from Lauterwein, A. *Anselm Kiefer Paul Celan: Myth, Mourning and Memory*. Translated by Wilson, D. Thames and Hudson, Paris, New York and London, 2007. p 25
- Fig 25: *Only with Wind, Time and Sound*. Anselm Kiefer 1997. Sand, emulsion, acrylic, shellac 470 x 940 cm. Image from Lauterwein, A. *Anselm Kiefer Paul Celan: Myth, Mourning and Memory*. Translated by Wilson, D. Thames and Hudson, Paris, New York and London, 2007. p 26-27

- Fig 26: *Women of Antiquity*. Anselm Kiefer 2002. Painted bronze and iron. Image from Art Gallery of New South Wales Contemporary Collection. In house publication, Sydney 2006. p 275
- Fig 27: *Women of Antiquity (Candida)*. Anselm Kiefer 2002. Painted bronze and iron. 177 x 130 x 125 cm. Image from Art Gallery of New South Wales Contemporary Collection. In house publication, Sydney 2006. p 274
- Fig 28: *Women of Antiquity (Hypatia)*. Anselm Kiefer 2002. Painted bronze, glass, iron and ash. 202 x 118 x 117 cm. Image from Art Gallery of New South Wales Contemporary Collection. In house publication, Sydney 2006. p 274
- Fig 29: *Women of Antiquity (Myrtis)*. Anselm Kiefer 2002. Painted bronze, iron and lead. 144 x 133 x 128 cm. Image from Art Gallery of New South Wales Contemporary Collection. In house publication, Sydney 2006. p 274
- Fig 30: *Magnolia*. Bronwyn Oliver 1999. Metal rods, 1.8 x 1.4 x 1.4 metres. Photograph taken by Janelle Mendham.
- Fig 31: *Vine*. Bronwyn Oliver 2005. Aluminum and water at the base. 16.5 x 2 x 2 metres. Photograph taken by Janelle Mendham.

#### How the work progressed

- Fig 32: *Sebastian* Janelle Mendham 2007. Pastel on canvas, 125 x 182 cm.
- Fig 33: *Birthday Flowers* Janelle Mendham 2008. Pastel and charcoal on paper, 126 x 90cm.
- Fig 34: *Going Home* Janelle Mendham 2007. Lithograph in three states, each print is 54 x 72cm. *Ram*, From Susa, Ancient Sumer (2800 – 2470 BC). Image from Malraux, A. and Salles, G. *The Arts of Mankind*. Translated by Gilbert, S. and Emmons, J. Thames and Hudson, France, 1960. p. 83
- Fig 35: *Hatch* Janelle Mendham 2007. Painting and drawing on lithograph, 63 x 46cm.
- Fig 36: *Sweep* Janelle Mendham 2007. Plaster, rope, wood, linen thread and fencing wire, 170 x 150cm. Photograph taken by Susan Dickson
- Fig 37: *Artemis of Ephesus*, 130-140 A.D. Gilded marble, Life-size. Photograph taken by Patrick Toohey
- Fig 38: Notebook drawing of *Sweep*. Ink on paper, 21 x 16cm.
- Fig 39: Notebook drawings of *Sweep* broomstick. Pencil on paper, 21 x 16cm.
- Fig 40: Detail of *Sweep*. Photograph taken by Susan Dickson
- Fig 41: Template body cast. Janelle Mendham 2007. Photograph taken by Susan Dickson
- Fig 42: *Onegammyeye*. Janelle Mendham 2007. Charcoal, pastel, varnish on paper, 120 x 100cm.

- Fig 43: *The hero-god Raven in the belly of a whale.* Jung, C. (conceived and edited), Jung, von Franz., Henderson, Jacobi, and Jaffe, *Man and his Symbols*. Picador, London, 1964. p. 59
- Fig 44: *Return* Janelle Mendham 2008. Plaster, metal, wood and glass, 135 x 135 x 190cm. Photograph taken by Alyssa Simone
- Fig 45: Studio shot of Doll and design drawings.
- Fig 46: Detail of silver box in *Return*. Photograph taken by Alyssa Simone
- Fig 47: *My Red Shoes.* Janelle Mendham 2008. Ink, charcoal and pastel on paper, 120 x 80 cm.
- Fig 48: *My Steel Dress.* Janelle Mendham 2008. Ink, charcoal and pastel on paper, 120 x 80 cm.
- Fig 49: *Grandma's Gloves.* Janelle Mendham 2008. Ink, charcoal and pastel on paper, 120 x 80 cm.
- Fig 50: *Shu Yi.* Janelle Mendham 2008. Ink, charcoal and pastel on paper, 120 x 80 cm.
- Fig 51: *Wine Cup (Mycenae) 16<sup>th</sup> Century BC.* Beaten gold, dimensions unknown. Image from: Hawkes, J. *Dawn of the Gods*. Chatto and Windus, London, 1968. p. 68
- Fig 52: *Return* Studio shot of body and skirt.
- Fig 53: *Return* (into black hole)
- Fig 54: *Plunge.* Janelle Mendham 2008. Plaster, wood, steel rod, and linen thread, 172 x 139 x 139cm. Photograph taken by Alyssa Simone
- Fig 55: Notebook drawing of *Plunge*.
- Fig 56: Detail of *Plunge*.
- Fig 57: Branding images, studio shots.
- Fig 58: Detail of *Plunge, Return and Shadow*.
- Fig 59: *Eclipse.* Janelle Mendham 2008. Wood, kangaroo, fur, steel rod, papier mâché, copper welding wire and plaster, 175 x 132 x 38cm. Photograph taken by Alyssa Simone
- Fig 60: Studio shot
- Fig 61: *Mothers Love.* Janelle Mendham 2007. Painted lithograph, 30 x 30cm.
- Fig 62: *Eclipse* (detail of lunar horns). Photograph taken by Alyssa Simone
- Fig 63: *Flying Blind.* Janelle Mendham. 3 etchings, each 30 x 30cm.
- Fig 64: *Eclipse* (detail showing bone like quality and fur)
- Fig 65: *One Thread.* Janelle Mendham 2008. Copper coated welding wire 41 x 41 x 41cm. Photograph taken by Terrence Munday
- Fig 66: Pilgrim flask. Image from Jones, D. and Mitchell, G. (ed). Colourless glass with brownish-yellow tinge, 23 x 21.5cm. Jones, D. and Mitchell, G. (ed). *The Arts of Islam: An exhibition organised by the Arts Council of Great Britain in*

*association with the World of Islam Festival Trust*. Westerham Press Ltd, England, 1976. p 143

- Fig 67: Notebook drawing of Pilgrim flask
- Fig 68: Notebook drawing of Re-ignite
- Fig 69: *Rupture*. Janelle Mendham 2007. Lithograph, 45 x 38cm.
- Fig 70: Studio shot The One thread of *Sweep*'s skirt.
- Fig 71: Drawings of three mazes. Dimensions unknown. Image from Jung, C. (conceived and edited), Jung, von Franz., Henderson, Jacobi, and Jaffe, *Man and his Symbols*. Picador, London, 1964. p. 177
- Fig 72: *Metamorphosis*. Janelle Mendham 2008. Mussel shells, glue, wood and polyfilament, 45 x 45 x 9cm. Photograph taken by Terrence Munday
- Fig 73: A representation of the Ouroboros from a third century Greek B.C. Manuscript. Dimensions unknown. Image from Jung., von Franz., Henderson., Jacobi., and Jaffe., *Man and his Symbols*. Conceived and edited by Jung, C. Picador, London, 1964. p 26
- Fig 74: *Path to Spiritual Enlightenment* Kim Hoa TRAM, 2005. Dimensions unknown. Image from promotional exhibition catalogue NGV (npg)
- Fig 75: Ouroboros of Dahomey, W. Africa Dimensions unknown. Image from Cooper, J. *An Illustrated Encyclopedia of Traditional Symbols*. Thames and Hudson, London, 1979 p123
- Fig 76: *Satan Devouring one of his Children*. Francisco de Goya, 1820-23. Wall painting in oil detached on canvas, 146 x 83 cm. Image from Honour, H and Fleming, J. *A World History of Art*. Laurence King, Great Britain, 1984. p 555
- Fig 77: *Lucifer*. Artist unknown, 1512. Image from Morgan, G and Morgan, T. *The Devil: A Visual Guide to the Demonic, Evil, Scurrilous, and Bad*. Chronicle Books, San Francisco, 1996. p. 14
- Fig 78: *Lioness Devouring Boy*. From the palace of Assyrian King Ashurnasirpal II. Ivory, gold leaf, lapis Lazuli and carnelian, 10 x 10 cm. Image from Phaidon Publishers. *30 000 years of Art: The Story of Human Creativity*. Phaidon Press Limited, London, 2007. p 160
- Fig 79: *Metamorphosis* (Detail of snakes head).
- Fig 80: *Voice* Janelle Mendham 2009. Plaster, steel rod and papier mâché, 149 x 61 x 130cm. Photograph taken by Alyssa Simone
- Fig 81: *Spine* Janelle Mendham 2008. Bronze cast, 8 x 2 x 2cm
- Fig 82: *Void* Janelle Mendham 2008. Bronze cast, 15 x 25 x 15cm
- Fig 83: Inside space of *Voice*.
- Fig 84: Detail of *Voice*.
- Fig 85: *Semi lunar* Janelle Mendham 2009. Plaster and muslin, 111 x 111 x 111cm. Photograph taken by Terrence Munday



- Fig 86: Buffalo skull. De Panafieu, J. *Evolution [in Action]: Natural History Through Spectacular Skeletons*. Thames and Hudson, London, 2005. P. 340
- Fig 87: *Semi lunar*- detail of surface.
- Fig 88: *Trouble* Janelle Mendham 2008. Ink, charcoal and pastel on paper, 200 (approx) x 150cm.
- Fig 89: Schematic of vagina, uterus, fallopian tubes and Ovaries compared to Georgia O'Keefes *Cow's Skull —Red, White, and Blue*, 1931. Image taken from Shlain, L. *The Alphabet Versus the Goddess; The Conflict between Word and Image*. The Penguin Press, London, 1999. p. 126
- Fig 90: *Venus of Laussel 'The woman with the horn'* C 20 000 – 18 000 BC. Carved limestone block from Rock shelter (Laussel) in Dordogne France 43cm high.
- Fig 91: *Snow* Janelle Mendham 2008. Oil pastel on canvas, 177 x 145cm. Photograph taken by Sophie Carnell
- Fig 92: *Horns of Consecration* 1500 BC, *Sacred horns and sacred peak*. Southward view of Mount Juktas from Knossos. Image from, Hawkes, J. *Dawn of the Gods*. Chatto and Windus, London, 1968. p89.
- Fig 93: Installation view of *Whole*. 2009. Plaster, styrofoam, wood. Final work inserted into the wall 286 x 458 x 70cm. Photograph taken by Terrence Munday.
- Fig 94: Studio shot of multiple horn casts taken from *Voice*.
- Fig 95: *Scroll* Janelle Mendham 2009. Ink wash, charcoal and pastel on paper, 120 (approx) x 150cm. Photograph taken by Sophie Carnell
- Fig 96: Emergent forms of *Whole* Photograph taken by Leigh Hobba.
- Fig 97: Inner spaces of *Whole*. Photograph taken by Terrence Munday
- Fig 98: Yin Yang Symbol. Image taken from Shlain, L. *The Alphabet Versus the Goddess; The Conflict between Word and Image*. The Penguin Press, London, 1999. p. 179.
- Fig 99: Emergent forms of *Whole*. Photograph taken by Terrence Munday.

### **Appendix III**

#### **List of Works Submitted**

***Sweep* 2007**

Plaster, rope, wood, linen thread and fencing wire  
Variable height x 150 x 150 cm

***Return* 2008**

Plaster, steel rod and plate, wood (oak and pine) and glass  
135cm x 135cm x 190 cm

***Plunge* 2008**

Plaster, wood (pine), steel rod, and linen thread  
172 x 139 x 139 cm

***Eclipse* 2008**

Wood (hemlock), kangaroo fur, steel rod, papier mâché, copper coated welding wire and plaster  
175 x 132 x 38 cm

***One Thread* 2008**

Copper coated welding wire  
41 x 41 x 41 cm

***Metamorphosis* 2008**

Mussel shells, glue, wood and polyfilament  
45 x 45 x 9 cm

***Voice* 2009**

Plaster, steel rod and papier mâché  
149 x 61 x 130 cm

***Semi lunar* 2009**

Plaster and muslin  
111 x 111 x 111 cm

***WHole* 2009**

Plaster, styrofoam, wood  
Wall 295 x 450 cm  
Dimensions of the Hole in the wall 180 x 120 x 80 cm